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Preschool Practice Manager: An Early Years Intervention A Case Study



STAR RIGHT LIMERICK

Preschool Practice Manager: An Early Years Intervention

A big thank you to all those who gave so generously of their time, energy and experience during the course of the research

Start Right Limerick designed and supported an early year's intervention in the Limerick Southside Regeneration Area, one of the most disadvantaged communities in Limerick city.



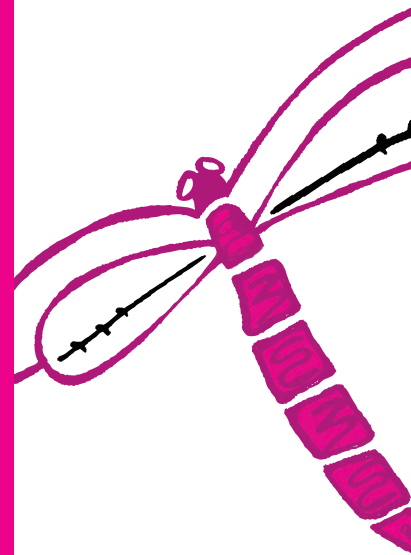
The intervention was innovative in a number of ways and took the form of a preschool 'Practice Manager' for one pre-school year.

The primary focus was

- hands on quality mentoring of staff
- quality service enhancement to improve outcomes for children.

This unique intervention was a process of change which

- fostered enhanced outcomes for young children
- set the precedent for parental engagement
- took an intensive and innovative approach to professional development.



Overview



Start Right Limerick is jointly funded by the Limerick Regeneration Agency and the National Early Years Access Initiative. It is an early intervention and prevention project that has been planned with quality, meaningful collaboration and sustainability at its core. Start Right works with parents and service providers to achieve better learning and well-being outcomes for children aged from birth to six years. It strives to link and integrate the child, family, local services and communities on the South side of Limerick. Start Right seeks to enhance the capacity of parents, families and services to work collaboratively towards better child outcomes and to develop integrated work practices and resource-sharing in the early year's sector across statutory, community and voluntary agencies.

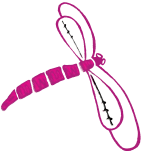
Start Rights work includes intensive on-site mentoring with early years practitioners (nine early years settings, seven of which are pre-schools) to promote best practice in early years provision and practice. In tandem with this, information is provided for parents, which is designed to promote open and regular communication and to enhance parental capacity. In addition, Start Right is implementing a Community Wraparound model, which aims to coordinate all work with an individual child, in partnership with parents and any additional service providers that may be involved in the child's life.

This document is the first in a series that highlights 'Learning and Legacies' from the Start Right Limerick project, a National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI). Research for this case study involved consultation and discussion with key stakeholders in the pre-school service. The focus was thematic and based on a set of particular topics to explore.

Thematic Focus of Research

- Perspectives on the preschool pre- intervention; its location, management, curriculum, parental engagement
- Issues and challenges facing the preschool pre-intervention; quality of service, children's needs, practitioner capacity, management
- Developing a partnership approach; building a working relationship between Start Right and the preschool
- Deciding on an intervention
- Multi-agency working and integrated work practices
- Implementing change; challenges and benefits
- Exploring changes in practice; meeting children's needs, structure, curriculum, interaction, play, practitioner capacity, engagement of parents
- Impact and outcomes of intervention on children, parents, practitioners and service as a whole.

This case study was chosen in order to highlight learning and to inform future interventions which serve to enhance the quality of early years policy and practice. It captures a range of factors encountered in the process of partnership development and in the unfolding of a change intervention. It highlights the role Start Right has played in facilitating the intervention and illustrates a range of outcomes as observed and experienced by key stakeholders.



Fostering a Partnership Approach

Start Right staff identified this preschool as falling within their geographical model area and made contact with the principal of the primary school it is located within. They outlined their role in working in partnership towards better outcomes for children. The principal welcomed Start Right and through initial discussions a number of issues around the quality of the preschool were highlighted. The period of initial access and engagement was an ongoing consultative process between Start Right, the principal of the school, the preschool voluntary Management Committee and the practitioners.

The initial stage of relationship development was a particularly important period. It set the tone for working together in a way that identified and supported their specific needs. The need for support was co-identified through initial consultation between the principal and Start Right.

A further dual approach in needs identification was developed through observation of the preschool environment and consultation with practitioners.



Key Reflection

Developing a partnership requires;



'Time' to foster mutual respect and a trusting working relationship.

Clarity around Start Right's role in supporting the individual needs of the service. Open channels of

Provision of clear and relevant information on quality enhancement in early years services.

communication

A dual approach in needs identification: observation & consultation.

Quality Concerns

Throughout the needs identification period, a range of quality issues were highlighted which were subsequently echoed in the Pre-School Inspection Outcome Report. While the preschool was consistently compliant with inspections, the report highlighted the adult directed nature of creative play activities, and emphasised the excessive focus on table top activities.

It also highlighted issues in staff capacity, and in particular behaviour management;

- staff tone of voice was noted to be high and “*negative language was used*” towards children.
- Excessive use of “*stop, no, and sit down*” was documented.

The majority of actions required were related to staff support and supervision.

In terms of management and staffing, recommendations were made for each staff member to receive regular supervision and support. The report recommended the identification and addressing of ongoing staff training needs.

In particular staff needed to be supported to

- meet individual children's needs
- promote engagement with parents
- engage in a curriculum planning system and
- plan for and support opportunities for play.

The report together with particular areas to be addressed which were highlighted by Start Right are summarised as follows:

Thematic Focus of Research

- Absence of appropriate Practitioner qualifications; lack of awareness of Síolta and Aistear.
- Adult directed practice, largely unstructured and 'ad hoc'
- Activities were unplanned and inconsistent with children's interests
- Erratic and inconsistent transitions between activities
- Very little variety in terms of activities provided; excessive use of puzzles, jigsaws and table top activities
- Little opportunity for children to engage in different types of play
- Excessive use of product based art and craft activities, (ie photocopied templates and colouring books) leaving little room for creativity
- Lack of practitioner capacity to interact with children in a way that reflects the child's needs for warm responsive relationships
- Limited parental involvement
- Inadequate policies and procedures.



Operational Issues

The Principal acknowledged the particular difficulty with

- being the legal manager of the preschool and
- not having the time or resources to actively engage with the preschool for any consistent period.

It was challenging to meet the needs of the preschool while having responsibility for the running of the school. The principal felt the preschool wasn't getting the attention it needed. While efforts were made to support the pre-school, the reality was, the primary school took priority, *"and the preschool has to wait"*.

Given the issues that had been highlighted through observations and consultation and reiterated in the preschool inspection report it was felt that the preschool required an intensive intervention.

Two main factors influenced the design of the intervention;

- the quality deficit in the pre-school service and
- the need for an onsite mentor to enhance practitioner capacity.

It was felt that *"unless there is somebody in there to lead the process, change isn't going to happen"*.

It was therefore decided in consultation between Start Right, the Principal and the Management Committee to develop a concrete plan for funding and recruiting a Practice Manager (IPPM) position for the service.



Key Reflection

Onsite guidance and mentoring by a highly qualified and experienced professional is core in enhancing quality practice and facilitating practitioner professional development.

Structural Changes

Between the period of initial partnership with Start Right and the completion of the intervention, a number of pre-school structural changes were facilitated.

On first contact, the preschool was operating from a prefabricated building on the grounds of the primary school. One of the first changes implemented was the rehousing of the preschool into the school building.

It was felt that this would facilitate a more coordinated approach in enhancing quality and the principal could also play more of a supportive role in facilitating practitioner development. This initial change was seen as positive by parents however the practitioners felt more observed as a result.

Funding

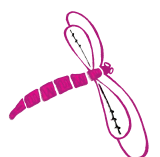
Start Right facilitated a partnership approach in securing funding for the position. Future plans for the geographical area include a new full service extended school model which will serve the same families and community as the preschool. The school falls within the geographical area and will be integrated into the full service model. The service model incorporates early year's services.

Consultation towards securing funding took place between Start Right, the Principal and the stakeholders of the developing full service extended school office. It was agreed that this intervention would serve to enhance the long term vision of the new full service school model.

“It was of utmost importance that structures and pre development work in terms of quality enhancement were put in place to ensure a high quality preschool service model was been integrated... Ultimately it was around achieving better outcomes for children.”

Once funding was secured the process for recruitment began. The person specification for the role, while similar to that of a general early years practice manager position,

- focused primarily on quality service enhancement and
- up skilling of practitioners.



Broadly the aims were to

- manage the day to day organisation of the early years setting and
- ensure high standards of care, education, safety and wellbeing of children and preschool staff.

In addition, the role involved supporting the up-skilling of current staff so that practice management of the preschool could be transferred to those staff during the pre-school year.



Key Reflection

In achieving long term sustainability and enhancing agreement on service plans, collaboration and 'buy in' between all stakeholders is essential.

Practice Manager in Operation

On initial introduction to the preschool, Tim, the successful candidate for the position observed

Environment

The environment as lacking opportunities for rich play experiences. The room layout was not consistent with an environment that fostered children's self-directed interests and activities.

He therefore set about making structural and curricular changes to practice which provided an environment in which children could learn through

“loving, trusting and respectful relationships, and through discussion, exploration and play” (NCCA, 2009).

A curricular approach provides for children's learning in a variety of ways and the environment influences how and what children play.

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play was also high on Tim's agenda for change. However a number of challenges were encountered such as

- the location of the playground
- lack of appropriate outdoor equipment, and
- balancing the needs of primary school children with the pre-school children.

Play was therefore seen as a priority for Tim and immediate plans were made to foster well-resourced, well-planned, predictable play spaces which would foster children's opportunities for play and learning.

Room Layout

The layout of the room was changed to provide a range of *'interest areas'* that encourage different types of play, such as creative, physical, language and pretend play.

In line with Aistear, the National Curricular Framework (NCCA 2009), and Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (CECDE, 2006), play was a fundamental element of the new preschool curriculum.



Practice Manager in Operation

Tim felt that “*Children can play and therefore learn*”. These changes within the setting were largely seen as very successful, in which children had the opportunity and freedom to move from area to area.

However, for practitioners where practice before was adult directed, this new curriculum was seen as lacking in structure and as letting “*children do what they wanted*”.



Key Reflection

Changes in practice and implementation of Aistear and Síolta require a unified and reflective approach between managers and practitioners.

Meeting Children's Needs

Families living in Start Right's model area are characterised by greater deprivation and have characteristics associated with poorer outcomes for children (Humphreys, McCafferty and Higgins 2011).

In terms of emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problems, children in the Limerick Southside Regeneration Area have been found to have a high level of difficulty as compared to the average population. (Humphreys, McCafferty and Higgins 2011).

This is echoed throughout the various interviews, and the consistent message throughout was that these children had an “*extremely high level of needs*”. The principal and the practitioners felt that

- deficits in children's behaviour
- their emotional and social skills, and
- their speech had become greater in more recent years.

They felt conflict between children was very frequent and described some children as having “*major behaviour problems*”.

Tim also experienced children as presenting with “*major trauma of some description*” and every day for the first number of months issues of conflict occurring between children required a troubleshooting approach in calming and reassuring the children.

Tim addressed children's conflicts in a systematic way utilising child centred evidence informed best practice techniques. Building empathy was an important part of practice. The techniques involved conflict management strategies informed by '*Head Start*' which support children's emotional and social development. This child centred way of managing children's behaviour fostered children's own self-regulation and development whilst also being a means of modelling appropriate techniques in terms of up skilling the practitioners.

The Principal felt the new Practice Manager was “*excellent*” in engaging with children. She sensed “*He had a wonderful understanding of each child, where they were at, and what their needs were*”.



Speech and Language Difficulties

Most of the 19 preschool children had very particular and acute learning needs. Speech and language difficulties were of particular concern as was evident in the junior infant class preceding the intervention year.

The Principal recalls,

that some children in the junior infant class who had previously attended the preschool, scored so low on their developmental vocabulary and verbal skills assessment that they could not even be rated on the test.

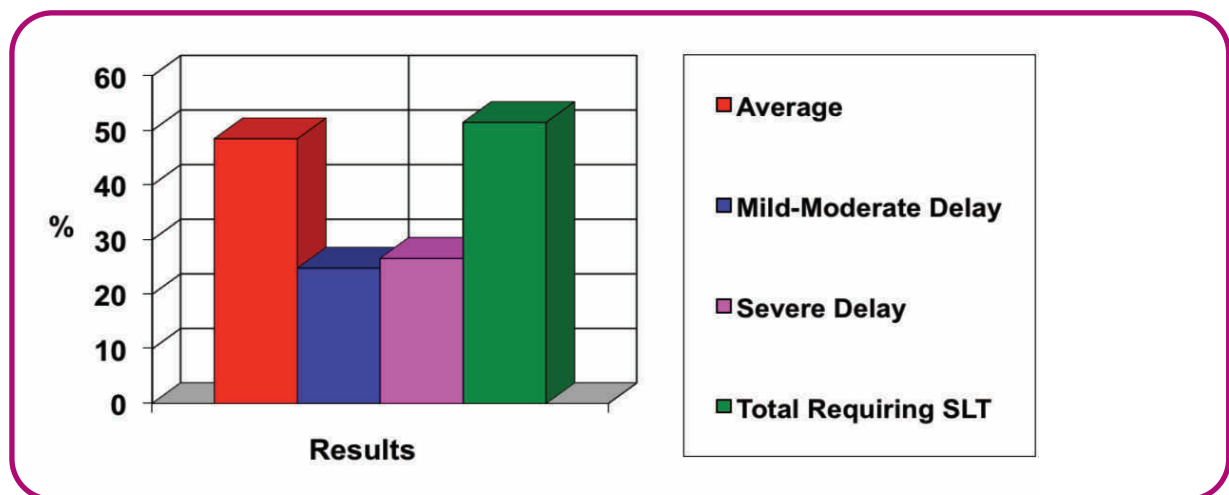
The Practice Manager also observed deficits during his tenure and felt that about *“75% have major language delay... Some were two or three years behind... there were 4 year olds who couldn't put a sentence together”*.

This deficit in speech and language development is reiterated in later findings of assessments conducted by the Start Right Speech and Language therapist.

- 451 children in the Start Right model area underwent speech and language assessments between 2012 and 2013.
- The results showed that 51.4% of children required speech and language intervention and the children in this preschool were particularly affected.

As concluded *“everyone had some form of language delay.... I wouldn't have said anyone was at the norm for their age...exactly no one... language is a huge huge problem”*.

Table 1. Start Right Speech & Language Assessment (2103)



At the beginning of the intervention, pending the recruitment of the Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) later that year, and in the knowledge that speech and language assessments would take a considerable period to conduct, it was felt children needed speech and language support as a matter of urgency. Through discussions between Start Right, the Principal and the Practice Manager, it was decided to fund ELKLAN (an evidenced informed speech and language training programme) to support Tim in providing for the particular speech, language and communication needs of the children. It was also seen as hugely beneficial for the forthcoming SLT to be able to link and communicate with a service manager who was trained in and understood the particulars of speech and language assessment and intervention.

Towards the middle of the preschool year, the Speech and Language Therapist began the assessment phase of children in the model area. As a result of this assessment, five children in the preschool were identified as needing Speech and Language intervention.

Typically, under the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) children would not have been assessed until junior infants. Having this assessment in preschool meant that these children made it onto a waiting list for intervention sooner than they ordinarily would and as a result accessed speech and language intervention during junior infants.





Outcomes for Children

Having a Practice Manager on site who consistently placed high quality at the very forefront of the day to day practice meant that children benefitted immensely from the intervention. The principal felt that Tim was *“hugely successful”* in supporting the implementation of quality practice and in *“improving children’s learning experiences”*. The quality of his *“interaction with the children was outstanding”*.

He engaged the children in activities which represented their natural interest and provided for a range of different types of play. He formed confident relationships with the children, which fostered their holistic development.

In terms of children’s transition to primary school, in comparison to other cohorts of preschool children, this particular group of children *“have progressed a lot further in their junior infant year than their predecessors”*.

They have the listening skills, the eye contact and the ability to interact with each other and with the teacher. This sentiment is expressed by the junior infant teacher who noticed considerable differences in the junior infant cohort than previous years.

“I couldn’t believe how ready they were... Simple things like going to the toilet and taking their turn...hanging up their coat... I thought it would take me up until Christmas to get that... judging from other years”.

Generally, it was felt these children were *“more able to engage”*. In terms of children’s emotional and social development, the teacher could see definite improvements compared to other years. She felt the work in preschool was distinctly evident in children’s ability to socialise well.

The ability of children to transition from preschool to primary school has also been a particular challenge for parents. The teacher of this group felt that the transition was made all the more easier by the fact that children had the ability to settle well relatively quickly. She felt that parents viewed the transition more positively this year also. She recollects *“parents dreading the whole transition to big school”*. However *“this year, they [parents] feel they had been worried about nothing”*.



Key Reflection

Integrated work practices and multi-agency collaboration achieves better outcomes for children

Curricular Intervention

Parental
engagement

"Children had a good year"

Enhanced social &
emotional development

Children socialise well with peers,
they talk to each other

Enhanced listening and concentration skills

Maintaining eye contact

Enhanced speech and language development;
nursery rhymes, stories, engage in conversation

Ability to engage in junior infants structure and
routine

Skills development;
*hanging up coats, forming a line to go outside,
toileting, turn taking.*

General improved ability to settle well.

Enhanced
learning
experiences

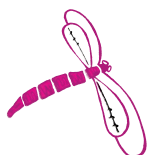
Fostering
practitioner
development

High quality
adult-child
interactions

ELKLAN
training
support

Variety of
play
experiences

Appropriate activities
based on child's
interest



Parental Engagement

Enhancing the capacity of parents, families and services to work collaboratively towards better child outcomes is the fundamental aim of Start Right and as such parental engagement with the service was seen as particularly important. Activating the voice of parents in their communities was seen as integral to the holistic approach in enhancing child outcomes. In tandem with parental engagement within the preschool, Start Right organised a series of events which facilitated parental involvement and 'agency' in accessing services and in empowering parents in their role (i.e. communication sessions, community consultation events, etc).

Parental engagement was encouraged and facilitated in a variety of ways; however initial concerns were raised about the perception of a male Practice Manager. While it took a significant period of time for the relationship with some parents to develop, it was facilitated by existing relationships between parents, the Principal, the Home School Community Liaison Officer, and the Family Resource Centre Family Support Worker.

Tim had particular concerns regarding parents dropping children off in the morning that needed to be addressed. Tim observed children entering the preschool alone. While parents may have dropped them to the main door, by not physically bringing their child into the room, concerns were raised. Not only was important information about a child not exchanged, there were obvious child safety issues. New policies and procedures were immediately implemented and communicated to parents. While these changes could have hindered parental involvement, it was felt that parents reacted very positively.

The transition from home to preschool can be a particularly challenging time for both children and parents. Parents were encouraged to stay with their child in those first days and weeks of preschool to ease the transition. While this aspect of parental involvement was seen as positive, it was new for parents and was not always seen as practical for parents to stay with their child.

Tim encouraged parents to become involved in events such as Halloween, Christmas and children's graduation celebrations. A particularly significant partnership event which captured the spirit of enhanced parental engagement was a fundraiser that was organised in order to purchase outdoor play equipment. This fundraiser garnered support from the majority of parents and was a milestone in that it was the first time parents participated in a preschool event. As a result, parent was noticed talking about the preschool in a more positive light.

"Parents started talking about...how they knew what their children did that day. How they were informed, if there were any issues...there was now a dialogue with parents...and parents felt involved"

Fostering parental engagement was a continuous process that encouraged in parents

- a sense that they were valued
- a voice and
- a right to be involved in their child's education and care.

This sense of parental involvement was subsequently experienced by the primary school junior infant teacher of that preschool cohort who noted a very positive relationship with the parents. While she couldn't say for sure what the contributing factors were, it was clear that there was a difference in parent's willingness to engage as opposed to parents of other cohorts. She felt parents had the confidence to come to the door and speak to her and were *"so much more approachable"*



Key Reflection

Empowered to ask questions of a service

Parental engagement is a process that takes time and is facilitated by open and friendly communication. Parents need to feel

Endeavours to involve parents need to take account of the parent's current status, their previous experiences of engagement and their preferred means of communicating with practitioners and managers

Policies and procedures that are communicated and implemented effectively facilitate smoother transitions for parents and practitioners

Excellent communication skills are essential in fostering positive communication with parents

Children's transition can be facilitated by encouraging parent's involvement, and by acknowledging and supporting the capacity of parents to be involved

A multi-agency and integrated approach that takes account of existing relationships with parents can facilitate greater engagement



Fostering Professional Development

The Practice Manager intervention focused primarily on intensive service quality enhancement with a particularly strong emphasis on training and up skilling the practitioners. It was envisaged that through a comprehensive approach to professional development, practice management would be transferred to the early year's practitioners once the Practice Manager's contract ended.

The level of internal capacity for change was ambiguous for a number of reasons. Practitioners had been working, to a large degree, in isolation, in terms of the location of the preschool in the prefab, and in terms of management and support. It was important that the intervention encompassed a particular approach to up skilling that acknowledged practitioners current understanding of early years practice, and guided practice in a way that was sensitive to practitioner responses and attitudes to change.

The most immediate concern was the lack of formal training practitioners had received and as a matter of urgency they were encouraged to embark on accredited training in early years practice. Both practitioners undertook FETAC Level 5 training and this was seen as a positive step forward in terms of enhancing practice. Another element of practice that required intense focus was adult-child interaction and the approach to children's behaviour management. Through modelling good practice and encouraging the practitioners to take the lead in planning activities, it was felt their capacity to engage in new practice would be fostered.

While the practitioners originally felt there was "*no need for a manager*", on reflection their experience of having a practice manager was new and "different". Tim had highlighted the important nature of providing opportunities for various types of play and the benefits of a child centred curriculum which supported children's learning and development.

In terms of onsite support and mentoring, practitioners felt

- his methods in working with them was "fair"
- he was very approachable and
- gave consistent "feedback" on practice.

The experience had the potential to broaden practitioner awareness of child development and early years practice. However, there was reluctance to take the lead in planning and supporting activities, which was evident in low levels of personal initiative and later made explicit when both practitioners declined to take on a lead role in the preschool.

A number of aspects impacted on practitioner up-skilling. During interviews with practitioners, some important factors came to light. While both practitioners felt "*we do the best job we can*", on recognising that a practice manager would be recruited into the service, they felt undervalued in their roles. Having a manager come into the service that they had run for many years sent them the message that they were "*not capable of doing the job yourself*".

While enhancing practitioner capacity was an ongoing and continuous process, towards the end of the year and most notably at the beginning of the next preschool year, positive changes were observed in terms of practitioner attitudes and practice. Where adult-child interactions prior to the intervention were adult-led, the practitioners were now observed “*sitting on the floor with children, assisting children, helping them*”. Feedback indicates that the practitioners were “far more interactive with the children” and engaged “*now at the children’s level*”. In addition towards the end of the intervention, practitioners seemed to be much more open to trying new things.

While Tim was enthusiastic to ensure children had an appropriate and stimulating environment, on reflection he felt he made changes too quickly which may have hampered progress in the long term. He also acknowledges that in order to facilitate motivation of others it is important to provide and support a vision for change.



Key Reflection

In fostering professional development there are a number of considerations to take into account:

Communication

- Open and honest communication between manager and practitioner is vital
- Clarity around roles and responsibilities for practitioners and managers
- Change management communication and rate of change is important.

Practitioner capacity

- Practitioner level of qualifications and prior experience
- Practitioner values, attitude and beliefs towards early years practice
- Practitioner disposition towards reflective practice and change initiatives
- Level of practitioner personal initiative.
- Practitioner’s feelings of self-efficacy.

Collaboration

- A dual role in needs identification (observation and self-identified)
- Trust in people and trust in the intervention is important, particularly during periods of change (Oreg 2006)
- Building positive working relationships takes time
- Shared decision making (collaboration, participation input and ownership) facilitates implementation of change (Durlak and DuPre 2008).



Lessons for the future

Resources

Resources and funding often dictate the levels of quality a service offers. An intervention such as this, which provided intensive onsite quality support and mentoring fostered enhanced outcomes for young children, set the precedent for parental engagement and took an intensive and innovative approach to professional development. The 'key reflections' and learning from this intervention may serve to inform policy development and future interventions that aim to enhance quality in early year's practice. For example, the new forthcoming Early Years Specialist Support Service will involve early year's specialists working in partnership with early years settings to develop their capacity to provide high quality early years experiences for children and families. A number of lessons from this intervention may inform the delivery of services like that of the Specialist Support Service.

Early Year Practice

Early years practice yields strong benefits for children when it is of high quality. The Practice Manager was highly qualified, experienced and exceptionally skilled in early years practice. Quality practice is built on the unique role of the adult and what makes this intervention distinctive is the particular focus on quality enhancement within the pre-school on a day-to-day basis. One of the most important aspects of quality early years service lies in adult-child interactions and indications are that this aspect of the intervention was incredibly successful.

Challenges

Challenges were encountered on the road to enhancing the quality of the service and progress took time. A number of outcomes have been identified as a result of the integrated approach to service enhancement in this instance.

Structure

Changes in structure, operation and curricular approach meant that children benefited from the intervention in a number of ways.

- They had access to a high quality play based curriculum and
- had opportunities to engage in activities that represented their own interests.

Benefits

Many of the benefits of the intervention were evident when children started in junior infants. In addition children who required early intervention had access to speech and language support before starting primary school.

Parental engagement

There are indications also that the intervention set the precedence for parental engagement in the preschool which was subsequently sustained when the children started school. Enhancing practitioner capacity through mentoring and support was an ongoing process and there were a number of influencing factors. Of particular importance is the need to acknowledge current situations and build relationships that create a dialogue for shared decision making.

Quality

In particular, quality early years practice occurs within a framework of integrated working and relationship development which acknowledges the ongoing process of quality. The necessity and value of onsite guidance and mentoring by a highly qualified and experienced professional is core in facilitating practitioner professional development (Sammons, 2010).

Success

The success of the intervention was to a large degree determined by the initial level of partnership between Start Right and the school. Initial stages of gaining access to the service required

- a professional approach that invited partnership,
- offered support and
- co-identified service needs.

Foundation

This foundation in relationship development together with an integrated approach had an impact on the long term suitability and sustainability of quality enhancement in the service. Key lessons can therefore be learned from the development of this partnership.

A final message which captures the essence of implementing change in practice, is summarised by Tim when he said;

“It’s just worth noting that change is difficult. It doesn’t happen quickly”



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Appendix A: Job Description for Pre-school Practice Manager

Job-Description Interim Preschool Practice Manager – Limerick Southside

Background:

Start Right Limerick is an early intervention and prevention project on the South side of the city that seeks to develop better learning, health and well-being outcomes for children aged from birth to six. The professional development of early years staff is a core element of Start Right's work. In order to further enhance practice and to support the up-skilling of current staff, Start Right is supporting Southill Junior School to appoint a Practice Manager for a Southside preschool. The preschool has the capacity for 20 children and is currently staffed by two early years practitioners.

Reporting to:

The successful candidate will be employed by Southill Junior School and will report to the Pre-School Management Committee, consisting of the Principal of Southill Junior and representatives of Start Right Limerick.

Objectives:

- (a) To manage the day-to-day organisation of the early years setting and to ensure high standards of care, education, safety and well-being of children and pre-school staff.
- (b) To support the up-skilling of current staff so that practice management of the preschool is transferred to those staff during the pre-school year.

Main duties and responsibilities:

1. Early Childhood Care and Education

- Ensure that the developmental needs of all children are met within a framework of planned activity and early learning experiences
- In collaboration with the staff team, prepare long, medium and short term curriculum plans for the pre-school setting
- Be responsible for implementing systems of observation and record-keeping so that each child's progress is effectively monitored and assessed
- Organise a key worker system



Appendix A:

Job Description for Pre-school Practice Manager

- Ensure high standards of quality assurance in all areas of the early years curriculum
- Adhere to the Child Protection Policy of the pre-school and ensure that any concerns are acted upon immediately and appropriately
- Keep strictly confidential any personal information relating to the children, their families or members of staff learned as part of the job
- Encourage the active participation of all parents in the setting
- Organise and facilitate progress meetings with parents (one per term)
- Represent the group during the HSE inspection processes
- Coordinate special events and outings.

2. Staff Supervision and Support

- Facilitate weekly staff planning meetings (Mondays) and review meetings (Fridays)
- Offer support, supervision, advice and direction to the staff team and promote a strong sense of teamwork
- Identify and support the training and up-skilling requirements of the staff team
- Carry out monthly appraisal of staff performance
- Encourage commitment to quality improvement through ongoing professional development for the whole staff team.

3. Management and Administration

- In collaboration with the staff team and pre-school management committee, update and implement all policies and procedures of the setting
- Maintain all records relating to the management of the setting
- Regularly monitor and evaluate practice and the quality of the service
- Network with appropriate statutory and voluntary agencies.

4. General

- Ensure equality of opportunity for all children, staff and parents
- Lead by example, adhering to a professional code of conduct
- Ensure that high standards of hygiene and safety are maintained at all times
- Attend to any other reasonable duties relevant to the post.



Contacts and relationships

Working relationships will include the following:

- Internal:** Children and staff of the pre-school; School Principal; Preschool management committee
- External:** Parents and families; Support programmes staff – Start Right and the Southill Family Resource Centre; Staff from a range of other voluntary and statutory agencies (Incredible Years, HSE, Teen Parent Support, etc.)

Person Specification

- A third level qualification in Early Years Education or a related discipline
- Knowledge, understanding and practical experience of pre-school for young children, with a minimum of 3 years experience in an early years setting manager's role
- Thorough knowledge of the Aistear and Síolta frameworks
- Knowledge and practical understanding of child development and parenting
- Knowledge and understanding of legislation and regulations relating to pre-school provision for young children and the relevant inspection processes
- Knowledge and ability to create and implement policies and procedures consistent with legislation, regulations and local requirements
- Able to work independently and innovatively
- Experience of managing, supervision and appraisal of staff
- Ability to develop an effective team
- Warm and caring personality – friendly and approachable to families
- Ability to create and implement basic systems for child records
- Ability to communicate effectively with staff at all levels
- Commitment to equal opportunities for all children and families
- Knowledge of social exclusion and disadvantaged communities.

Terms and Conditions

- The post is part-time (20 hours per week) in the salary range of €35,882 to €43,278, pro-rata
- The contract is for a 10-month period, from August 30th 2012 until June 28th, 2013
- Closing date for applications is noon on August 2nd, 2012
- Interviews will be conducted on August 8th, 2012
- Completed applications should e-mailed to Maria O'Dwyer, Start Right Coordinator with PAUL Partnership: modwyer@paulpartnership.ie
- Canvassing will disqualify.



Start Right Limerick aims to improve outcomes for children under 6 years of age living in the Southside of Limerick City. Start Right is governed by 3 core principles:

1 Sustainability:

The programme will leave a strong legacy of improved quality of practice and service capacity, as well as through the introduction of new practice.

2 Service integration

3 The involvement of parents

The Start Right Programme serves children by applying these principles in

- a Building quality and professionalism in early years services
- b Offering an improved range of services accessible through both statutory and voluntary services, such as Art Therapy, Infant Massage, and Home-based supports to parents
- c Improving communication and coordination between agencies to ensure that the children are at the centre of needs led, rather than supply led, service provision.

These case studies aim to highlight what statistics cannot: that for practitioners, parents and carers the quality of relationships and interaction between people is as important as the changes being introduced. Whether in the context of improving quality through a practice manager, building confidence in early years practitioners to engage with parents and other services, and learn from each other, or taking the time to support parents who would not have otherwise engaged with services, the stories contained in the case have two common themes:

- Parental engagement is essential to effective intervention
- Quality services require quality relationships

We hope you find these studies both interesting and practical.



**PAUL
PARTNERSHIP
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*Turning the tide of unemployment
Ag tionsú taoide na dífhosaitochta*
**PÁIRTÍOCHT
PAUL
LUIMNEACH**

NEYAI National Early Years
Access Initiative
Promoting Better Outcomes for Children & Families



**LIMERICK
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