

Parents as Partners in Early Learning

Case studies

The international new arrivals project

Sandwell

'The initiative was extremely well timed, coinciding with the sharing of key PPEL principles and effective practice through the development of children's centres.'

Saeeda Butt, PPEL coordinator

Sandwell's Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) funding was used to set up an international new arrivals' scheme. Key aspects of the scheme included:

- forging inter-agency links;
- bespoke staff training;
- creating activities and sessions targeted at new arrivals;
- encouraging newly-arrived parents to move to full engagement with early years services.

Evaluation evidence shows that the programme has made a significant impact on practitioners' ability to support newly-arrived parents. Significant improvements have also been made in the engagement of newly-arrived parents with early years services.

department for
children, schools and families





Meeting the Challenge of new arrivals

Sandwell is a unitary authority with significant levels of local deprivation and an ethnically diverse population. The number of international newly-arrived families is rapidly increasing and for this reason the authority chose to use its PPEL funding to set up an international new arrivals scheme.

Sandwell already had good systems in place for newly-arrived children on entry to the education system, providing a welcome service that offers a holistic approach for children and families. The PPEL project highlighted the need to identify and register all newly-arrived families that would benefit from this service and a pilot exercise was initiated by the children's centre monitoring officer. Schools forwarded their census data to the PPEL team, which enabled the children's centre to contact newly-arrived parents and offer advice and guidance about becoming involved with early years settings.

The value of training

'Imagine the embarrassment and confusion for a young child just arrived in the UK and attending their first day of nursery... His teachers are kind and attentive, but he cannot understand why they keep cursing him. And what had the nursery staff done that was so offensive? The answer: merely giving the child regular "thumbs up" signs to indicate their approval – a gesture that in the Middle East has very different connotations.'

Gill Rathbone, manager of the New Arrivals, Refugee and Asylum Seeker team

In addition to improving the identification of new arrivals that could benefit from the welcome service, the project also offered courses to train practitioners. Gill Rathbone devised and delivered the training, which is aimed at 'deepening practitioners' sense of the challenges facing refugees and migrants and alerting them to the dangers of cultural clumsiness... The two-hour sessions provide enough time to achieve some crucial goals.' So far, 381 practitioners from 15 children's centres and an early years unit have attended these sessions.

Devising activities

The training also raised consciousness among practitioners when providing services and engaging families in early learning. Training sessions highlighted the use of a Family Activity Pack for new arrivals, designed by early years practitioners. It is designed to be left with carers and parents, promoting opportunities for learning arising within simple daily routines such as sorting out washing or walking to school.

Other good practice encouraged by the training included:

- the employment of multi-lingual early years practitioners who will be able to screen children in their first language;
- the recruitment of newly-arrived families to be volunteers and mentors;
- extending the range of newly-arrived materials for new arrivals in toy libraries;
- developing local area welcome packs;
- encouraging more inclusive information displays concerning children's centre services;
- a greater use of interpreters;
- the appropriate use of culturally-sensitive play equipment and story sacks.

More switched-on parents – the benefit to children

The programme has led to positive outcomes for encouraging and sustaining new-arrival involvement in early years services.

In feedback conducted during the eight to twelve weeks after the sessions, participants demonstrated extremely good recall of the course content. Initial statistical analysis shows that after the training 100% of the staff felt better-informed about working with new arrivals.

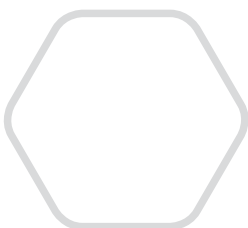
Interviews with parents and evaluations of the work in children's centres revealed an increase in the number of newly-arrived parents attending workshops and activities. One of these parents has subsequently become a volunteer mentor to other newly-arrived parents at a children's centre.

'The training helped me to consider my practice, and where I could be adding the kind of information that new arrivals need to get a firmer understanding of what's on offer to them. Also, it has made me think about what broader advice I could be offering.'

Joy Lester, community development worker

Collaboration – a key to sustainability

The new arrivals training encouraged practitioners to make better use of the resources and expertise available through local statutory and voluntary services associated with new arrivals. Also highlighted as a crucial aspect of best practice was joint-working with other agencies such as schools, GPs, health visitors, the local Citizens Advice Bureau and Jobcentres.



Key findings:

- The benefit of identifying and encouraging newly-arrived children as early as possible using conscientious data collection via schools and children's centres.
- The importance of training so that practitioners are alert to the special needs of new arrivals, and are also aware of the kinds of cultural insensitivities which may damage communication and engagement.
- The necessity of ensuring effective targeting of resources to give the greatest possible benefit to newly-arrived families.
- The importance of collaborative working with statutory and other specialist agencies.
- The necessity for the local authority to be committed to effective monitoring to enable the provision of targeted services.

For further information contact:

Saeeda Butt, PPEL coordinator

Tel: 0121 557 4035

Email: saeeda_butt@sandwell.gov.uk