

Dingley's Promise: Change Makers Early Years Inclusion Project

What Parents and Carers Told Us

July 2020

Acknowledgements

We want to start this paper with a huge THANK YOU to the parents who enabled us to write it. We are passionately committed to reducing inequalities and will endeavour to use your experiences to that aim.

Introduction

Parent/carer representatives from each local area we are working with meet on a quarterly basis as our Parent Board. We facilitate these meetings to support parents in their remit as a representative on the local stakeholder groups, and to capture the unique perspective and ideas on how the project is going. The group are successfully and vitally co-producing the project.

The Parent Board has over of 20 representatives at the time of writing, a minimum of 2 from each of our year one areas. During a recent meeting we asked those present to share their experiences of taking up their early education entitlements. This paper aims to capture the experiences that were shared through a series of quotes from the parents we have engaged with. All individual details have been anonymised to enable sharing locally and nationally.



The purpose of documenting these quotes is enable you, as key stakeholders leading the project locally, to share them through your marketing and promotion, events and reports. Our hope is that the comments will bring to life your communications locally, in terms of the many difficulties our children and families face, and help consolidate our shared passion and commitment to the project aims.

What Parents and Carers Told us

1. One working parent described how her sons' anxiety required particular attention from staff, who quite simply didn't always have the time her child needed. The parent had been asked to stay with the child as a solution, however of course this does not meet her legal entitlement. The parent was in no way critical of her setting, but of a system which is currently not able to be child focused. The impact on the whole family was evident.

“The impact of that for me is that I can't work during the week. I'm a self-employed as a care worker and I'm now working 20 hours work over the weekend which is taking away from our family time. My eldest son, who visits school five days a week, barely gets to see me. We're losing all those family moments as well.

I am so close to pulling him out because honestly, it's not working for anyone”

2. Another parent describes how her two children were accessing their entitlement with additional support, but when the parent asked for an additional day (within her entitlement) she was told the extra support was not available. Again, this parent wanted to work. A complaint was raised and the support was granted. However, after a short period of time the setting decided to award the additional support to another child.

Again the parent complained and some resolution was found in response, however the support decreased again and this impacted on both the children and parents mental health.

In this case we wanted to highlight the impact of having to complain several times in order to access what this family were legally entitled to.

“I was so upset and like I actually cried, and I don't cry usually. Having my children in those sessions was so important for my mental health.”

3. One parent described her autistic daughter as being continuously overstimulated in a school setting. Because of the child's intelligence and ability to mask, the impact was felt at home (in a secure enough environment for it to show). A great deal of effort and support has been put in by the parent, however the situation didn't change and it leaves her feeling not believed. This situation creates a very stressful dilemma for parents, how do they ensure children have their education entitlements, when they know the effect the environment can have?

“I actually had a conversation with the inclusion officer the other day and said that if she was coming to you and disclosing to you what she's disclosing to me at home and showing the behaviour and level of anxiety in school that she does at home after a day in school, she would not be allowed to be at home with me. I would be deemed unfit to care for her and she would be taken away from me but because it's a legal requirement that she must be in school, so I have to keep sending her to an environment where she's not safe and not cared for. So, I'm currently locked in a huge battle with the school.”

4. Another parent described how she felt her child was acting as a “cash cow”. That she had seen additional funding come into the setting and new equipment sourced, however as soon as there are staff shortages her child (not others) is asked to stay at home.

The same parent describes how her child's autism was not understood by the setting despite many conversations.

"I've been told in a writing recently in the last week, that he's been banging his head a lot at nursery now. This has apparently been going on for a long time and I haven't been informed. I'm just finding out now that it's becoming very severe. I explained to them that he doesn't do this at home. But they don't understand him. If they understood autism, they would be able to identify the issue and work with him to resolve it. The settings response was that they wanted to get him a helmet, but my response was that it would be better to work at finding out what the issue was and nipping it in the bud so that he stops that behaviour rather than being allowed to continue hitting his head repeatedly."

The same parent had been supported with training to understand autism and develop strategies which they hoped would be applied at the setting.

"It was lifechanging for us. We learned that he just wanted to be heard. We found a way to give him a voice and whilst it doesn't work every single time, it does most of the time help him to be less frustrated. So, I know they could do this at the nursery but they don't have the know-how."

5. In many of our meetings with parents we hear the impact on families of not being able to work. Reduced income as a result of not being able to access the 30 hour entitlement is a particular concern as the cost of living escalates. One parent even mystery shopped providers locally, first of all asking for places for a child with no additional needs and then with.

"I want to work but I can't work. I had a really good job previously and I can't return to it. There's the stigma of your child being different and then there is the stigma of not being able to work. I

want to work but I actually can't because my nursery won't offer me hours. Even though I could have 30 hours they can't give me the hours because they can't give my children anymore hours. You ring up and ask about places and they say yes we have x number of hours and then you tell them your child has SEND and suddenly those hours aren't available. It's not fair. "

Finally, we wanted to share some of the closing comments our families shared with us which we hope you will share far and wide too.

"My child needs to socialise and have these experiences more than other children not less"

"It felt like me and my child were being rejected over and over"

"What happens to the parents who are not articulate and confident enough to complain?"