

Introduction

The Hub is based within Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre in Newham and reaches out to a growing network of providers which currently includes 7 early years' settings, 7 local primary schools and a network of more than 20 childminders. The Hub builds on a pre-existing network of providers, who had come together to share practice and build a support network. The Hub has brought a new energy to the network and a clear focus across its members on driving up quality, improving parental awareness of childcare options in the area, and creating new opportunities for blended childcare.

"We want the Hub to give more of a sense of options to parents – if they want to engage in training or employment, the system here will support them doing that." (Hub Lead)

Success and impact

The Hub has enhanced a range of existing projects/activities including practitioner training in relation to language development, creative learning, and maths, as well as activities to improve the quality and uptake of provision, particularly for 2 year olds. At the same time, it has led to the creation of new activities including a pilot project with Sheringham primary school to explore transitions across different settings. The Hub has also widened its reach by bringing together early years practitioners with health professionals through its *'Working Better Together'* conference which focussed on health issues.

Through the work of the Hub, **parents can now access more flexible childcare** through the creation of blended childcare options, greater awareness of childminding and what it can offer, and the development of an after school club for primary school pupils.

"It is working. Parents are seeing that they can have a piece of this and a piece of that, and it all joins together." (Hub Lead)

The Hub has provided a wide range of training to its members, including courses from the charity ICAN and an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) course. The training has helped providers in their day-to-day work by **increasing their confidence, inspiring them to build new activities into their practice and increasing their awareness of broader issues such as sexual health**. Crucially, much of the training has been offered for free in the Children's Centre and a crèche was provided to enable childminders to access it.

"Networked learning means that we have improved through the quality improvement groups we have set up, and settings and childminders have felt positive about learning together. We have moved away from the model of "disseminating good practice" and into the model of peer-learning and creating knowledge networks." (Hub Lead)

In addition to training, the Hub is seeking to drive up quality through a newly developed ‘*green, amber, red*’ system to **encourage providers to continually assess and improve their standards**.

The Hub aims to be a ‘**one stop shop**’ for childcare information and to this end it has developed a new website and revamped the reception area at the Children’s Centre. This provides both a virtual and physical central information point about childcare in the area.

“The Hub has really made us focus on publicity and parent outreach and engagement”
(Hub Lead)

Challenges

Whilst providers feel that the quality of childcare has been improved as a result of the Hub, there are persistent issues with a lack of work available for childminders, as parents in the area have traditionally opted to use extended family or nurseries instead. The Hub is exploring how to widen parents’ awareness of childminders and what they can offer in a bid to increase the number of families opting for this kind of childcare.

Learning

Sheringham’s experience to date has generated a number of learning points:

1. **Joint training has been important** - practitioners from different settings have enjoyed learning together and creating communities of practice and knowledge sharing.
2. **Monitor and evaluate your progress** - the Hub’s training programmes have been supported by the use of robust quality audit tools (ITERS-R and ECERS-R), and all settings have had an independent audit focusing on the quality of their 2 year old provision.
3. **Think carefully about logistics when offering training** – consider hosting this in the local Children’s Centre where crèche facilities are available, and if possible, look for training that is free of cost to encourage attendance.
4. **Think holistically about childcare in an area** – so that any changes in one provider or group of providers do not impact negatively on other types of provider.
5. **Create more demand for childcare through targeted marketing and publicity activities** – whilst improving quality is an important focus of the hub, it has also been important to create more demand for childminding and / or blended childcare which has not traditionally been a popular option for parents.

The future

Over the next year, the Hub is aiming to expand its membership, increase the number of funded 2 year places and focus on developing provision for 'at risk' children. Specifically, it has plans to develop information for parents whose children have special needs, make childcare information available in different languages, and initiate a Childcare Champion Programme, with a parent volunteer already trained to inform Newham parents about blended childcare options.