

## Small Steps- Involving parents using the ECAT Stepped Approach

Aston Springwood Whizzkids is a charitable trust that opened in 2002. We offer early years care to children 2-5 years. Our aim is to provide a safe, secure and stimulating environment which promotes emotional health and well-being, ensuring equality of opportunity for all children and families within the local community.

In this case study Rachel Mulleague, June Gude and Caroline Elwell explain the 'stepped approach' they used to create a positive partnership with their parents and families. The 'stepped approach' is based on the ECAT model of engaging families.

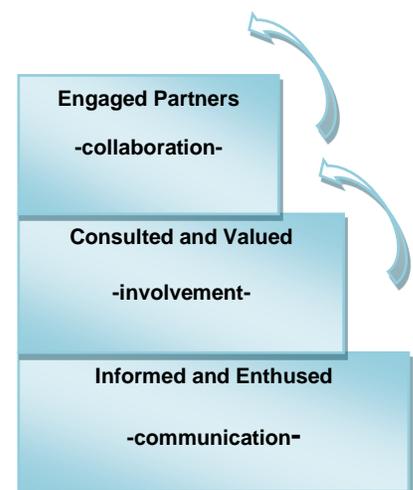
### Introduction....

The importance of parental involvement in children's learning has been widely researched. The Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) project states that good quality relationships between parents, practitioners and children are fundamental. If these relationships are developed well, communication will flow backwards and forwards between settings and home which will lead to genuine learning partnerships (National Children's Bureau 2007).

We wanted to establish stronger communication links with our parents to enable us to achieve this goal.

### What we did.....

As part of the EYPP project we devised an action plan to involve our parents. This involved a whole setting approach focusing on a 'Book Month'. We then did some work on parental engagement using a stepped approach (ECAT) and realised we had jumped straight to the top step of collaboration, totally missing out the steps of communication and involvement. We decided we needed to start with the basics and concentrate on having good communication in order to inform and enthuse our parents.



We sent letters to our parents explaining our reasoning around communication and we purchased tablets to enable us to set up email communication with our families.

Dear Parent/Carers

We are looking at different ways in which we communicate with our parents. As you all know you are more than welcome to come and speak to us at any time, whether that is your child's key person, the room coordinator or the management team. We understand that sometimes it can be hard to catch a member of staff as everyone is so busy and letters and notes can get lost or misplaced.

Therefore we would like to know if you would like to be contacted through email. This way we would be able to send newsletters and information on events etc. We could also send you things like photographs of your child or ideas of activities you can try at home.

Once we had the parent's agreement we emailed photographs to the parents of their children whilst they were involved in their play and activities.

Hi mummy, I've been busy this morning icing biscuits and blowing bubbles outside.



Hi mummy, I've iced a yummy biscuit for snack, and I worked really hard in the IT suite in school.



That looks fun princess, see you soon.

That's lovely, thank you Aaron 😊

Parents responded immediately to their children's emails and photographs and thought it was a "fantastic idea", they commented that "we've looked at the photographs together and shared them with the family".

### Our Next Steps are.....

To move through the Stepped Approach, and start asking open questions alongside photographs, for example, "Aaron really enjoyed this activity, what does he like to do at home?" We want to encourage parents to reply and promote the partnerships we have started to build together through continuing to share observations and celebrate children's achievements.