



## Early Learning and Community Childcare Hubs practice case study

*Perspectives from Contact a Family hub delivery.*

### Top tips

Key themes from the sessions include:

- Remembering to see the child first and meet their individual needs rather than making assumptions based on diagnosis, previous experience with other children or family reputation. (For example in Earlham hub which is on a large social housing estate where families can quickly gain a reputation for being 'difficult').
- The importance of getting to know the individual child and building a good relationship with their parents. Try using of one page profiles<sup>1</sup> to help with this.
- Being aware of the impact a diagnosis has for the parents and wider family including siblings that might be at the same setting.
- Recognising that a parent of a disabled child has a lot of competing priorities with appointments and involvement from other professionals so the need for them all to work together is important when doing reviews and asking for parents to attend meetings.
- Make use of the Contact a Family helpline and information library both for themselves and to pass onto parents. Hub practitioners really appreciated being shown all the things on Contact a Family website, it made them feel that they had somewhere they could confidently get information from and direct parents to.

### Context

Contact a Family, is the UK charity for families with disabled children and young people - what the condition, whatever the needs, wherever they live. Contact a Family have partnered with 4Children on the Early Learning and Community Childcare Hubs programme for the last three years. In 2015/16 they delivered bespoke SEND training to the Hubs.

### What benefits did the Hubs get from attending the Contact a Family bespoke training?

*"The session was really useful as it brought people together from different settings to share their experiences and feelings - leading us all to feeling less isolated and confidence about our practice."*

The feedback from was very positive with attendees commenting that they learned more about how behaviour is triggered and what can be done to help the child. They understood more about the impact of challenging behaviour on the wider family and how to communicate better with families.

Attendees also reported feeling more confident to know what they are doing is having an impact - gaining confidence in existing knowledge and practice.

Also a strong theme that came out was about working with and supporting the family more in a wider context and not just focusing on issues in the setting. They reported being better able to understand the needs of children and trying to plan activities in a more effective way. They liked the tools we introduced them to including the Behaviour Log and the Communications Passport<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See [Contact a Family, Behaviour that challenges information guide.](#)

The sessions with hubs also focused a lot on exploring the similarities between the experiences and feelings of the parents and the professionals in the hubs – stress, fear, helplessness, isolation, conflicting demands upon time, budgets etc - and how to develop mutually supportive relationships between parent carers and professionals.

Hubs also fed back that they think the bespoke training on SEND should be made available to more staff to benefit from!

### **Supporting childminders**

The hub professionals really welcomed the Contact a Family resources as they didn't really know where to get information on the SEND reforms and wider issues for families with disabled children. Childminders in particular really need support and information on SEND.

Childminders said they had concerns about some of the children they cared for may have SEND but didn't know how to have conversations with parents or who to talk to about their concerns.

### **Improving quality and confidence of hubs?**

As well as the practical implications remembering the impact that a diagnosis or emerging difficulties will have on a parent emotionally. This can have an effect on how you build relationships, gain trust and work in partnership, families may present as 'angry' 'hostile' or 'in denial'.

Contact a Family focused a lot on this in the sessions as hub practitioners found this a key difficulty and one they felt they needed the most support with. How to share news or how to start the conversation if you have concerns about a child was also identified as a key area, we spent some of the sessions sharing ideas and strategies for this.

### **What were the challenges with delivering bespoke SEND training to the Hubs?**

There was a mix of level of knowledge within the groups ranging from some practitioners stating they were well aware of the SEND legislation to others who had limited knowledge. However, all welcomed the opportunity for discussion.

The twilight sessions can sometimes rushed with attendees saying they would have liked more time to discuss the case studies based on real life scenarios.

I delivered very differently as the childminders wanted to discuss concerns about dealing with particular situations, and how Contact a Family could help with these. i.e by information or providing advice to the family via the helpline.

I had another session booked but it was cancelled by the hub due to low take up and I could not pin down another date. This hub told me that childminders in particular found it hard to attend training in the evening due to a lack of childcare for own their families!

We found that the professionals that did attend did not seem very 'linked in' with the hub and were not really sure what it was all about.

### **Improving information for families with disabled children through hubs?**

Contact a Family have a series of factsheets available to help families understand changes to the special education system. Topics include:

- [Help in the early years when your child has additional needs \[PDF\]](#)
- [Extra support in mainstream school - SEN support \[PDF\]](#)
- [Education, Health and Care needs assessments \[PDF\]](#)
- [Education, Health and Care plans \[PDF\]](#)

Contact a Family parent guides are free to download or to order in print from our helpline. The following guides might be helpful for hub to pass onto parents looking for information:

- [When your child has additional needs \[PDF\]](#) - an overview of the different sources of support
- [Getting social care services when your child has additional needs - England \[PDF\]](#) - includes information about short break services
- [Money matters - a checklist when your child has additional needs \[PDF\]](#) - an introduction to the financial help families might be entitled to.

For more parent guides on topics such as aids and adaptations, holidays and leisure and understanding your child's behaviour, see our [full publications list \[PDF\]](#).

### **Next steps for Hubs?**

A dedicated team of Contact a Family parent advisors will work in every region in England delivering SEND information sessions, workshops and events for parents. These can be offered via the Early Learning and Community Childcare Hubs. Topics include:

- coping and support - the causes and impact of stress, tips and sources of advice and support for you and your family
- [behaviour that challenges us](#) - the causes and effects and impact on family life, and strategies and sources of support
- [benefits](#) and [disability living allowance](#) - an overview of benefit entitlements, recent changes, tips and sources of help and support
- [helping your child sleep](#) - understanding sleep issues, tips for parent carers and sources of help, advice and support

Find out if Contact a Family are running a session in your area by visiting the '[in your area](#)' section on their website or ring the Contact a Family helpline on 0808 808 3555.