

Building SEND inclusion in the early years

Quotes and stories shared by parent and carer representatives on the Dingley's Promise Inclusion Project September 22- March 23

Introduction

Parent/carer representatives working with Dingley's Promise on the Change Makers Inclusion Project have been asked to share their experiences of both taking up early years provision, and transitions to school.

This paper provides anonymous quotes from those who responded, which can be used to support presentations, briefings and papers by anyone involved in the project in order to retain a focus on our families.

Finding and taking up early years and childcare

Whilst many parents and carers struggle to find and afford childcare, those families with children with SEND face particular challenges. The following quotes represent this group and highlight the impact good early years provision could have on a range of issues such as mental health, employment, poverty and ultimately outcomes for children.

"I can only leave my child if I know staff are invested and care, it's about how it feels and will feel for my child"

"My mental health was suffering anyway. I needed a break from 24/7 caring and I just kept being told there were no spaces or I had to go through yet another process when other families just got theirs"

"Work was an outlet for me as well as an income source but I had to move my work to weekends which means I cram 20 hrs work into 2 days and have no time as a family"

Parent representatives on the Dingley's Parent Board July 22

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

"I felt like my child was a cash cow"



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“My nursery have started asking me to have my child at home because they can't get staff”

“To understand my child you have to understand autism. My child was anxious at nursery and started headbanging . But instead of looking for the source of the anxiety the staff wanted me to buy him a helmet.”

“If I rang around and asked for spaces it was fine, but if mentioned my child had additional needs I was immediately told they were full”

“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. It's not fair.”

One member of staff also described how one family had experienced trying to support her child into provision.

“The mum said that it was incredibly stressful and tiring. It impacted her mental health and also her ability to fully concentrate on anything else. Both parents had full time jobs but were expected to stay the entire session, interact with the children, but distance themselves from their child. She had the sense that if a parent was there, it was not the manager's responsibility to look after the child.

When they did move the child to another nursery, the new nursery asked for all of the original paperwork, as well as the paperwork that they had done whilst she was with them. There wasn't any.

It's just horrible, but she's doing well in the new setting. I'm sure I'm not the only person she has spoken to about how awful the whole experience was.”

Another parent described a mixed experience of being supported to take up services referring to her here child as “A”.

“A had lots of support from a young age as he was referred to Portage services when he was 6 months old. A loved visits from his portage worker who would always bring fun activities for him, and give me ideas for games to play at home. She was also crucial in telling me what support A would be entitled to, helping me secure DLA funding for A and ensuring he had an EHCP in place before he started nursery.



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A was granted funding for 15 hours a week at 2 years old due to his DLA payments. I realise how lucky we were to be 'in the system' and that A's disabilities had been identified at a very young age. A's portage worked recommended the local Children's Centre as they had plenty of experience caring for children with additional needs.

I did try local private nurseries, explaining on the phone some of his needs and what his (at that point draft) EHCP specified. The standard response was either *We'd love to have him, we're a really inclusive setting, blah, blah, but we just can't meet his needs* or no call-backs from management.

I left the process of applying for nursery placements for A feeling like I didn't have much choice. Yes, he goes to the Children's Centre, and yes, I think he is well-cared for and he enjoys going there. There was a really good handover from the portage team to the SENCO at nursery and I agree it is absolutely the best setting for him. But it really was the only option available to us if I wanted to claim the Early Years education he was entitled to."

Another parent highlights the impact of limited local provisions.

"It was very difficult as there are long waiting lists. We had also a child who requires SEN support and there is literally only one nursery in the council, quite far from our home and works with waiting list. It is also not suitable for us as works in half terms and we are full time working parents. That means our son is not getting the right support as he is the only child at nursery with Special needs and they don't have the expertise to help him. this has a huge impact in his early years support, education, family and expectations. Also the prices of childcare are absolutely insane."

Transitions

Lots of families expressed great concern about children with SEND leaving there early years settings to start school. For many of this period felt like a cliff edge, where are they leave not only the familiar setting, but often other support staff such as portage workers. Information exchange and good relationships between the early years setting and school can be seen as vital here.

"It was difficult. The school didn't ask for a history on the child after he was awarded a place at the school, I had to call them to make it known. And then once he started it came to light that not much of that history had been passed on from the Early Years lead to the class teacher. The transition was really difficult for my son and stressful for us as parents. We were lucky to have a great teacher to help."



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“The transition was very difficult for my son as the teacher recruited hadn't have experience with children on SEND register so coping with his feelings was not easy for her. The phone calls from the school gave a lot of stress and anxiety. The worry constantly in me was affecting my son. I was constantly worried and scared for my safety for my child at school. His behaviour at school was not happening at home so I was concerned why it was happening at school.”

“My son got a space due to sibling criteria. Generally the time has been up and down for my son, as the school has had it tough dealing with his emotions of regulation. As a family we have learned a lot during this year how to deal with my son's emotions and to help his SPD. I wish that the transition for him would have been done better planned and to help him.”

A grandparent also shared her experience of daughter and granddaughter.

“My Granddaughter was in the process of being diagnosed and was only allowed to attend the school nursery for 1 hour a day. This went on for some weeks. The school was too far for her to go home and so she remained outside the school for the hour each day. Her child enjoyed attending and was distressed when he had to leave before the other children. His mother wasn't happy with this but didn't want to rock the boat by complaining.”

“I'm so nervous about starting my daughter's ECHP and about the lack of resource and support my daughter may need. I don't know about local mainstream schools, I don't know where to start and I worry about what she will miss out on or not have her needs met. I need to continue to work so there is worry about holiday, after and before school clubs. No one tells you what's there for your child. My child does not have a regular social worker anymore who helped support me and spoke to me, now I'm left to my own devices and I have no idea what I'm doing tbh.”

Finally as one parent added, those who have shared their experiences are those who can.

“What happens to the parents who are not articulate and confident enough to complain?”.

