Dingley’s Promise: Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion Project

**Briefing Note**

1. **Introduction**

This document provides an overview of the Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion Project, run by Dingley’s Promise. It will give more detail about Dingley’s Promise, what the project aims to achieve and the role of our parent/carer representatives.

We genuinely appreciate the commitment required of a parent/carer to take part in this project, and commit to both providing support and to listening to the experience of families throughout.

1. **Background to the Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion Project**

Dingley’s Promise supports children in the Early Years with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and their families, across Berkshire. The charity runs six children’s centres in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, Gloucestershire, Southampton, Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. Dingley’s Promise also works across the UK championing inclusion within the Early Years Sector on a national level. A local charity with a national impact, Dingley’s Promise is passionate about sharing skills, knowledge and experience to transform the Early Years for children with SEND.

In July 2021, Dingley’s Promise was successful in securing funding from Comic Relief for a five-year project to help tackle the UK’s shortage of Early Years places for children with SEND. The project runs from July 2021 – June 2026 and support positive change through four interdependent work streams (Section 5).

Throughout our work and this project, we are very committed to ensuring the genuine participation and coproduction with families, and have designed this role profile for parents and carers who wish to get involved as a representative in their local area and nationally.

1. **Aims of the project**

The project aims to increase the number of young children with SEND accessing early years and childcare places.

The current shortage of universal places holds back thousands of young children every year, needlessly restricting them to special education, failing to integrate them into mainstream society, and costing the country millions of pounds. Dingley’s Promise research shows that a lack of training and low staff confidence are the main reasons that many settings have limited/no places for children with SEND.

The United Nations defines access to quality education as a child’s right, yet 78% of LAs have insufficient Early Years SEND places. Only 25% of 3 and 4 year olds with SEND currently access the 30 hours Nursery Education Funding, compared to 75% of non-SEND eligible children.

1. **Local Authority partners**

We will work with 32 local authorities to reach over 30,000 practitioners over the life of the project.  LAs who joined us in year one (2021) are:

Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council

Dorset Council

Lambeth Council

Slough Borough Council

Solihull Metroplitan Borough Council

Southampton City Council

Swindon Borough Council

Reading Borough Council

Wiltshire  County Council

Worcestershire County Council

Our second cohort who joined in 2022 include:

Birmingham

Bristol

Calderdale

Gloucestershire

Herefordshire

Manchester

North Yorkshire

Redbridge

Somerset

Wandsworth

Our final cohort two joined us in July 2023 are:

Bracknell Forest

Cornwall

East Riding

Kent

Leicester

Lincolnshire

Liverpool

Sandwell

Stafford

Rochdale

Torbay

1. **Project Workstreams**

The Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion project runs from July 2021 – June 2026 and will support positive change through 4 interdependent work streams:

1. A comprehensive online training programme for practitioners
2. Strategic support for the LA areas engaged to support long term impact
3. Co-production with families throughout
4. Realising maximum impact nationally and internationally through the steering group

**Workstream 1: Skilling up our workforce - training for practitioners**

Through this project, Dingley’s Promise will be delivering a comprehensive programme of 10 online courses (approximately 5 hours each to complete) aimed at **all e**arly years practitioners in a total of 30 LA areas. The courses are accessed remotely by individuals however many groups find it useful to complete together. Courses include:

* + Introduction To Early Years Inclusive Practice
  + Early Years SEND Transition
  + Having difficult conversations
  + Managing behaviours that Challenge
  + Voice of the child
  + Intersectionality
  + Leadership and management

The remaining three courses will be developed in response to needs that are identified over the life of the project and are due to be released by the spring term 2024.

Evaluation feedback from practitioners who have participated in the training so far has been extremely positive with over 96% reporting they feel confident they will include more children with SEND as a result. We know our training courses significantly increase access to early years provision for children with SEND, which is why the project is so ambitious. With LA support the aim is to reach every practitioner working with young children locally, including early years settings (including Childminders), schools, LA staff, health colleagues etc. We want to create new norms where the training is a part of everyone’s induction or ongoing continuous professional development.

**Workstream 2: Supporting strategic planning around Early Years inclusion**

LAs hold legal responsibilities to ensure sufficient early years and childcare provision locally for **all** children and families. For this reason, LAs are re a critical partner in the achievement of the aims of the project, bringing a wealth of experience, commitment and passion to promote inclusion.

Dingley’s Promise acknowledges, however, that early years is sometimes treated as a lower priority than other children’s services agendas, such as safeguarding and schools. Dingley’s Promise is passionate about ensuring long-term sustainable change and will work with each LA to engage senior leaders and decision-makers to facilitate this. We have seen the impact that high quality inclusive universal provision can have on children with SEND and their families, and are keen to support our aims and your local challenges to meet ever growing demand.

Throughout the project, each LA area will be supported to develop a local stakeholder group which will meet twice a year (facilitated by us) to review and/or develop a local plan to drive change. These local groups will ensure the impact of the training is realised through engaging a range of partners who can influence change and drive training take up across the whole workforce.

Dingley’s Promise will also support joint working and sharing best practice through a regular peer network for participating LAs. This peer group and our collective experience so far, has supported us to develop tools and resources to help LAs to measure the sufficiency of places for children with SEND. This has been a critical piece of work in ensuring legal compliance locally, as well as preparing for the extension of the early years entitlements and influencing change at a national level.

**Workstream 3: Co-production with families**

Dingley’s Promise will ensure that throughout the Comic Relief Early Years Inclusion project, there is co-production with families and each local stakeholder group will be expected to include parent/carer representation. Representatives will be given support through an induction session and regular communication. Representatives will join a national Parent Board to help oversee and steer the project, as well as enabling representation at our National Steering Group.

Our parent/carer representatives have proved their weight in gold throughout the project so far. They have been promoting the project locally, supporting training take up, mystery shopping and many more activities locally, as well as acting as our voice nationally.

**Workstream 4: Sharing success and advocating for change**

A significant element of the project is the formation of a National Steering Group which will help to shape and action the project’s successes and outcomes. This group will include members of national inclusion organisations, parent/carer representatives, professionals from the LAs that are taking part, the Department for Education and our funders. The group will make recommendations to be shared both nationally and internationally, and, where appropriate, will lobby for change.

**7. The role of parent/carer representative**

We are committed to ensuring the voice of parents and carers are central in the design and delivery of this project. In order to achieve this, we have designed a supportive and rewarding role which involves:

* Acting as your local area parent representative in your local area stakeholder group which will meet twice in year one, and at least annually in subsequent years.
* Collaboration with other parent/carer representatives across the country through participation in a Parent Board which will meet quarterly.
* Representing the views of parents and carers on our national steering group which will meet twice a year.

All meetings will be held remotely and held at a time or day that suit the needs of our parents and carers. To date these meetings have been held during an evening and online to support accessibility.

We appreciate that the role entails both commitment and confidence. We are keen to support genuine engagement as well as (we hope) a great opportunity to part of positive change.

The following bullets have been collected and shared with our existing parent/carter reps.

**What we will offer:**

* An informal induction meeting to bring all of our representatives together (online), to share understanding of the parent/carer representative role and help shape it.
* Skilled and sensitive facilitation of all meetings to support participation.
* A confidential Parent Board where honest feedback can be shared and agreed messages and actions taken forward.
* Regular communication throughout the programme.
* A highly skilled, experienced, knowledgeable and passionate team working with you throughout.
* Representation at a national and international level in feeding back key learning and your challenges to decision makers whenever the opportunity arises.
* A project which listens and will adapt as we inevitably learn more about you, your area, and what makes a difference to children and families.
* A great opportunity for professional development in being part of an international project.

**What’s in it for you?**

* Being part of positive change
* Feeling heard
* Making connections, friendship and peer support
* Acting as an advocate locally
* Creating opportunities for other parent/carers locally
* Being part of an inclusion movement

**What’s in it for us?**

* Increased awareness of the project
* Increased awareness and take up of the training
* Demand led change across the whole area
* Parent/carer experts to advise us throughout
* A lasting legacy
* A great team of parent/carers to work (and have fun) with!

**What sort of thing have our reps been up to so far?**

* Spreading the word to other families locally
* Joining in the LA planning meetings
* Using social media to promote positive messages and celebrate success
* Attending parent and practitioners events and groups to promote the project and training
* Attending events and networks to represent the experiences of parent/carers
* Mystery shopping to see which providers locally are aware of and engaged in the project
* Creating leaflets, Q and A sheets and other coms
* Speaking at local and our national events
* Acting as a buddy for other new parent/carer reps

**What we ask of you?**

That you are a parent/carer (or grandparent) of a child or children with SEND (who are preferably but not essentially under the age of 5 years), living within the LA area you will have just enough:

* Time to commit to the meetings (as far as anyone is able!).
* The confidence and ability to share your experiences as a parent/carer of a child with SEND.
* An objective and respectful approach to engaging in meetings.
* A commitment to keeping open communication with us to keep us informed if your ability to take part changes.
* A positive, can do, solution focus to help us deliver a brilliant project and improve outcomes for children and families.

 8**. For further information**

Please keep in touch throughout and follow us on:

[www.dingley.org.uk](http://www.dingley.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/dingleygroup](http://www.facebook.com/dingleygroup)

Twitter @dingley

Instagram @dingleyspromise

[www.linkedin.com/company/dingleyspromise](http://www.linkedin.com/company/dingleyspromise)

We look forward to working with you on this exciting project!