



Early Years Matter – Briefing Paper

Targeting children and families at risk.

The National Education Trust has targeted their early years programme in the most deprived areas of England. Research has shown that when all those working with under fives are consistent and coordinated in their advice and support, this has a positive impact on the most disadvantaged children and families. We are creating networks of people who will be strong advocates for disadvantaged children and families in their local communities. Networks of children's centres who are able to share best practice and work together to offer effective targeted interventions.

The five Early Years Matter networks have been located in areas where 60% - 79% of children under five are living in poverty. The majority of centres engaged in the programme are located in super output areas i.e. 70% + social deprivation. The programme has been designed to impact on the most disadvantaged children and their families through developing the work of children's centres in each of the localities. We aim to work with the managers and centre staff to equip them with the skills to identify the needs in their local communities and provide information about a range of strategies which will directly impact on their targeted intervention with disadvantaged families.

We provide children's centres with training, mentoring and support through the EYM networks as they strengthen their crucial role in breaking the inter generational cycle of deprivation (Graham Allen Report on Early Intervention 2011). <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/early-intervention-next-steps.pdf>

The focus is on high quality leadership, effective partnership working and family engagement. The centres become strong advocates for children and families in their local communities, providing services that will challenge disadvantage and change lives

The NET programme focuses on children in the Foundation Years because research has shown the importance of intervening early, ideally with children under the age of three.

(Ref: Frank Field Report)

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110120090128/http://povertyreview.independent.gov.uk/media/20254/poverty-report.pdf>

There is a focus on family engagement, early attachment and 'bonding' because we understand the impact that these early experiences can have on long term mental health and well being, early interaction and communication. We are able to draw on the expertise of early education specialists, psychologists and speech and language therapists who are all associates within the NET early years team.

We believe that Children's Centres are well placed to carry out this vital work with the most disadvantaged children and families. The buildings are often located at the heart of the community, and are already accepted and valued by those living in the community. This was evidenced during the riots earlier this year. The children's centres were not damaged and in some cases were protected by their local communities. Some of the managers played a key role in encouraging dialogue and mediation between the local community and the police and this is an area which has the potential to develop in the future.

The staffing structures, governance and funding of children's centres varies across Local Authorities and communities. Each centre was set up differently and has developed its own way of working. There is a lack of consistency across the sector and to some extent a lack of clarity about the core purpose and functions of a children's centre. The challenge for NET has been to bring together people who have very different qualifications and experience to share their practice, share their experiences and reflect on how it could be improved. Through the networks, we are able to gather information and build a picture of local service provision and practice for disadvantaged children and families across England. We are working with partner organisations and researchers to see how services can be improved and extended in the future.