

Evaluation of the EYSEND Programme

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**Authored by
Prof. Lucy Betts, Dr. Sarah Buglass, & Dr. Gayle Dillon**

**NTU Psychology
Nottingham Trent University**

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Introduction

The Council for Disabled Children, who are part of the National Children's Bureau, asked NTU Psychology to undertake a small-scale evaluation of the impact of the Early Years SEND (EYSEND) partnership. This partnership was led by the Council for Disabled Children and involved six strands of activity with: nasen, Speech and Language UK, Contact, the Council for Disabled Children, Dingley's Promise, and the Early Childhood Unit at the National Children's Bureau¹. The partnership was funded by the Department for Education's Voluntary and Community Sector programme from August 2023 to March 2025 and has involved working with family hubs networks to support disabled children and children with SEN during the early years.² The EYSEND Partnership *"believes that if we put in place the right interventions, care, and tools to support children from the early years onwards, they will have greater opportunities to thrive at school, in further education and in their working lives."* (Welsh & Soni, 2023).

The partnership works at a strategic level across local authorities, parents/carers, settings and school staff, health, and representatives across the sector (Welsh & Soni, 2023). There are three areas of activity in the current offer³:

- Strategic support to family hub areas through regular meetings or 'action learning sets'
- Targeted training for practitioners from family hub areas
- Open-access training for parents and carers.

To date, two evaluations have been undertaken relating to the offer^{4,5} but these have had less of a focus on qualitative approaches. The most recent evaluation conducted in March 2023 highlighted how the EYSEND partnership acted as a *"convenor and hub for knowledge sharing and systems change"* (Early Years SEND partnership, 2023 p. 2) working with over 21,000 people over the previous three years. Previous evaluations have focused on collecting numerical data to evidence impact. Qualitative data which

¹ [About the EYSEND Partnership](#)

² [About the EYSEND Partnership](#)

³ [About the EYSEND Partnership](#)

⁴ [EYSEND Data and Evidence Report 06.06.23.pdf](#)

⁵ [20210914_EYSENDPartnership_FinalEvaluation_FINAL_0.pdf](#)

can provide a deeper understanding of the impact has not been collected, providing the rationale for the current evaluation.

Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to provide a robust understanding of the impact of: (a) the strategic work that has been undertaken with local areas and (b) how system change (e.g. better coproduction or transition strategies) at the local level has affected families of young children with SEND.

Method

Study design

The initial design was an online semi-structured interview study, with interview schedules designed for: (a) practitioners/local area leads and (b) parents/guardians in consultation with the National Children's Bureau. In order to capitalise on opportunities to capture views on the EYSEND programme, two additional online surveys were developed using the interview schedules which were hosted on Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT).

Participants

Potential participants were identified by the National Children's Bureau. For the interviews, out of a list of 12 suggested participants, a total of 6 participants were interviewed: 4 practitioners/area leads and 2 parents/guardians. All of those who participated in the interviews were female and aged 31-55.

For the survey, 37 practitioners/area leads opened the survey, with 15 full completions. All of those that completed the survey were female and aged 36-68.

Study materials

Undertaking interviews with an interview schedule facilitates objectivity and enhances trustworthiness in the research (Kallio et al., 2016). Therefore, a semi-structured interview schedule was co-developed, and agreed, with the funders for: (a) practitioners/local area leads and (b) parents/guardians. The interview schedules included questions about the impact, changes, benefits, and development of the work (see Figure 1).

Practitioners/local area leads

1. What was your role/how have you been involved in the strategic work provided through the Early Years SEND Partnership?
2. Looking back on the process, what do you think is the overall impact of the work so far?
 - a) For families?
 - b) For practitioners?
 - c) For local areas?
3. What local changes have you noticed that have arisen from the work?
 - a) For families?
 - b) For practitioners?
 - c) For local areas?
4. How has your local area benefitted from multi-agency working through the family hubs network?
5. Reflecting on the process, what do you feel enabled this to work?
6. Did you encounter any specific barriers within the process?
 - a) For families?
 - b) For practitioners?
 - c) For local areas?
7. How could the process be adapted to have greater impact for children with SEND and their families?
8. Is there anything else that you think we need to know about this work?

Parents/guardians

1. What was your role/how have you been impacted by the strategic work provided through the Early Years SEND Partnership?
2. How have you seen the SEND offer in the family hubs network change as a result of this work?
 - a) In what ways has it developed?
 - b) What do you think the impact has been?
3. What impact do you feel this has had on families of children with SEND? Do you have any specific examples?
 - a) For parents/guardians?
 - b) For children
4. Reflecting on the process, what do you feel enabled this to work?
5. Did you encounter any specific barriers within the process?
 - a) If yes, what where they? How do you think they impacted you/your family?
 - b) If no, why do you think was?
 - c) Are you aware of barriers that others may have experienced? What was the impact of these?
6. How could the process be adapted to have greater impact for children with SEND and their families?
 - a) What areas could be developed? Why?
7. Is there anything else that you think we need to know about this work?

Figure 1. Semi-structured interview schedules for practitioners/local area leads and parents/guardians.

Four questions were selected and simplified from each of the interview schedules for the online survey:

1. Looking back on the process, what do you think is the overall impact of the work so far?
2. How has your local area benefited from multi-agency working through the family hub network?
3. What barriers (if any) did you encounter within the process?
4. How could the process be adapted to have greater impact for children with SEND and their families?

Procedure

Prior to the evaluation commencing, favourable ethical review was received from the Schools of Business, Law, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University.

For the online interviews, staff at the National Children's Bureau initially approached potential participants. The research team emailed the potential participants and invited them to participate in the interviews. They were provided with information about the nature of the evaluation and were informed that any decisions around participating would not influence their relationship with the National Children's Bureau and the EYSEND provision. Prior to participating in the interviews, participants were asked to give their informed consent.

Interviews took place over Microsoft Teams and were recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted from 10 minutes to 56 minutes and were conducted during January 2025 and February 2025.

For the online survey, staff at the National Children's Bureau shared information and the link to the survey with their contacts. The survey contained an information sheet that provided information about the nature of the evaluation and those considering participating were informed that any decisions around participating would not influence their relationship with the National Children's Bureau and the EYSEND provision. Prior to completing the survey, participants were asked to give their informed consent through selecting a series of compulsory check boxes. Online surveys were completed in February and March 2025.

Analysis

Data collected from the interviews and surveys were analysed using an approach informed by reflexive thematic analysis which can be used to “*provide coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the data*” (Braun et al., 2019, p848). The six stages of reflexive thematic analysis were followed when analysing the data: (1) familiarisation, (2) generating codes, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) generating a report. Specifically, the transcripts and survey responses were read and reread for the purpose of familiarisation, following which initial codes representing distinct ideas and concepts were generated. These initial codes were then organised into broader themes representing clusters of interrelated codes. These themes were checked against their codes to ensure a good fit and then given names succinctly describing the ideas they represented. NVivo (QSR) was used to support the analysis of the interviews and surveys.

Results

Following the thematic analysis, three themes were developed that reflected the data (Figure 2)

1. Multi-agency working as central to enhancing system change and practice
2. Understanding impact for parents, families, and settings
3. Learning curve of setting up, implementing and embedding changes at the system level and settings level

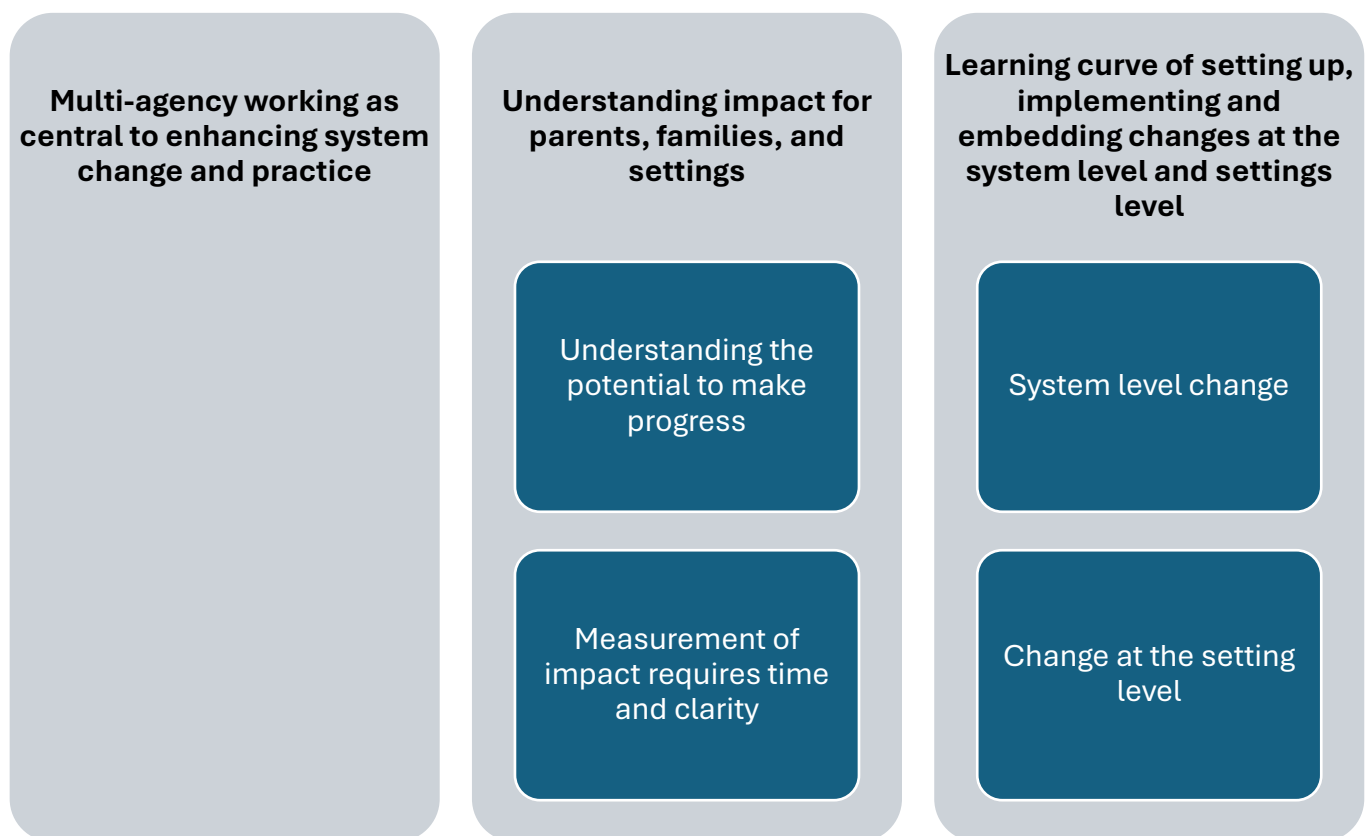


Figure 2. An overview of the themes.

Multi-agency working as central to enhancing system change and practice

This theme highlights the centrality of positive and effective multi-agency working to enable system change. Data suggested that participants had a clear desire

to engage in multi-agency working and stakeholder collaboration with “*professionals getting together to discuss quality first provision*” (S⁶3). This desire was driven by a recognition that through multi-agency working individuals could foster new links with members of other organisations to build collaborations and have opportunities to engage with other key individuals across the sector:

“And within our early years sector, it’s been an opportunity really to work quite collaboratively with a group of SENCOs, which we don’t always get the opportunity to do anymore. So that’s been beneficial” (I4).

“I can certainly say I’m speaking with partner members across the [area], across health, across social care, across commissioning, across public health that I actually probably hadn’t had a conversation with directly really before” (I5).

Crucial to this multi-agency working was a sense that even where individuals reported having good existing relationships with other stakeholders, the opportunity to engage in a time limited project with a clear focus and shared agenda meant that:

“just everybody pulling together and finding the way forward in a really effective and time managed way” (I5).

Participants also described the benefits of co-location, working in a similar space, engaging in face-to-face meetings, travelling to other organisations’ spaces for meetings, and having a clear agenda and agreed actions to facilitate and capitalise on multi-agency working. Through engaging in these collaborations, there was also a

⁶ Note S denotes a survey respondent and I denotes an interview respondent. Some quotes are not attributed to protect anonymity.

sense that there would be benefits for individual organisations to “*identify good practice and possible gaps in current practices*” (S14). These benefits of multi-agency working also extended to families through settings being able to provide joined up support and signposting:

“so settings know where to sign those parents, parents know what’s there, that they’re getting support in a timely way” (I4).

As well as families benefiting from the signposting opportunities afforded by the multi-agency working, one of the parent participants thought that families also benefited from multi-agency working because of the opportunity to engage with individuals from different agencies within one setting. This enabled parents to get a sense of who they could be working with and, for the professionals, a sense of the needs of the family. There was also a sense that such opportunities for families reduced potential barriers when they interacted with those professionals in the future:

“I think it would make them more comfortable with their dealing with them in the future if they’ve actually met them and they’re not just a name on a piece of paper or somebody on the screen, they’re actually a real person in front of them and vice versa for parents. For people to actually see that these children are real children, that parents are real parents; we’ve real struggles, not just a piece of paper or a name on the list” (I2).

Aligning to the parent’s account of multi-agency working promoting a shared understanding between practitioners and families, one of the practitioners who

completed the online survey described how multi-agency working enabled a shared understanding of provision (and the potential gaps in provision) to be identified:

“Improved understanding of how the services offered to the EY age range link up, understanding where there may be overlap and identifying where there may be gaps. This has been extremely helpful in shining a light on early intervention and prevention agenda, to utilise our data to initiate strategic conversations around key EY challenges, which has subsequently led to EY activity being prioritised in strategic planning around local area planning for SEND” (S2).

Another benefit that was afforded through multi-agency working was the perceived credibility of outputs associated with this work. For example, one of the participants described how through multi-agency working when developing the OAP (ordinarily available provision) document, it meant that stakeholders *“took ownership”* with a sense that parts of the document belonged to the respective stakeholders meaning that *“they brought into that and prioritised it”* and then shared the resulting output and learning with their organisations. This sense of belonging was further amplified through acknowledging the contributing organisations within the OAP. The participant also went on to describe how they thought that the multi-agency working meant that the contents of the OAP and the strategies that it contained were perceived as credible and were being widely adopted across professionals:

“They were part of it and that meant that when they are out on visits, that they’re flagging the document up as well. And I think that’s really helped because not just coming from the

education side, it's coming from the medical people who are medical specialists as well. And I think it gives it a bit more credibility”.

Creditability was also realised through working with external organisations as part of the EYSEND offer. However, although many of the participants described a desire to be engaged in multi-agency working there was recognition that some stakeholders did not have the capacity to commit to engaging with the multi-agency working at the required level. For example, one of the survey respondents acknowledged that the *“capacity of partner agencies has been a barrier to engagement”* (S10). There was also a sense that this limited capacity to engage with the required activities from some partners slowed the progress of work from the desired rate:

“capacity of key partner professional has been a challenge in moving forward at the pace we would like” (S15).

Supplementary account of the data on family hubs

What follows is a supplementary account of the data on family hubs. The interview and survey data were reviewed, and data relating to family hubs were extracted.

Perceptions about the family hubs varied across participants. When asked about the family hubs, some survey respondents acknowledged their signposting role. For example:

“The family hubs have been a signposting option, which settings and services have directed families too, to access further advice and support around issues which are impact families across our LA.” (S11)

This was also echoed by one of interview participants who said that information was disseminated through the family hubs. Another survey respondent who acknowledged the signposting role of the family hubs also acknowledged that through the family hub’s activities it also enhanced communication:

“It’s a good signposting facility and parents and settings have become more aware of the support available in the local area. Communication has improved with families and across services” (S9)

Family hubs were also seen as a “one stop shop for parents” (S7) that enabled community support:

“We have been able to get families back into the community and accessing universal services, providing them with care, support and advice at the earliest stages enabling the best start for life for those children” (S11).

There was also some acknowledgement, by the survey respondents, that the multi-agency working associated with the family hubs enabled knowledge transfer, facilitated tailored provision, and promoted a shared understanding of provision:

“Improved understanding of how the service offered to the EY age range link up, understanding where there may be overlap and identifying where there may be gaps. This has been

extremely helpful in shining a light on early intervention and prevention agenda, to utilise our data to initiate strategic conversations around key EY challenges, which has subsequently led to EY activity being prioritised in strategic planning around local area planning for SEND” (S2).

For some participants, family hubs were seen as something that were relatively new. For example, when asked about the family hubs, one of the interview participants talked about how the model was new and something that was being rolled out. They described how they were transforming the offer and adopting new practices including a “*family hub to you model*” using a “*hub and spoke model*” and how, following a successful pilot, the hub building will have a sensory room.

Possibly aligning with the relative newness of family hubs, when asked about the family hub offer three of the survey respondents said that they were either “*not sure*” or had not worked with the family hubs so were unable to comment. This was a sentiment echoed by one of the parents interviewed who felt unable to say whether there were any changes following the EYSEND offer at the family hub. However, the same parent did acknowledge that this may be because of how frequently they attended the hub:

“I’ve not personally seen anything, but I’m only based in, I go into one family hub twice a week, so I can’t really say if there’s been any changes”

The other parent said that with regards to the family hub they “*haven’t tapped into it too much*” and raised stigma as a potential barrier with family hub engagement:

“I think one of issue you get with family hubs is the kind of the stigma around them and the kind of like, oh if you go to a family hub then that could lead to this and that could to that. And I think it’s trying to get the community to understand the difference between a family hub and social services”

However, the same parent did say that they would like to attend some of the offer, but the date and time was not convenient for them.

Understanding impact for parents, families, and settings

This theme comprised two subthemes: (a) understanding the potential to make progress and (b) measurement of impact requires time and clarity.

Understanding the potential to make progress

The ‘understanding the potential to make progress’ subtheme highlighted that across the data collected there was a sense that engaging with the EYSEND offer, led to greater opportunities for positive impact for families. This potential operated at a range of levels through sharing information across stakeholders, providing guidance to practitioners, and offering practical information that could be adopted by settings and parents to benefit children. There was also a recognition by practitioners that engaging with the EYSEND offer was useful with those who had engaged with earlier iterations of the scheme choosing to do so again because they *“knew it was useful”*. Another participant described how their involvement has *“snowballed”* because they had seen the value of one scheme and then took the opportunity to engage with other offers which they described as *“a real gift to be able to do all of those and have a real*

breadth". The usefulness of engaging with the EYSEND offer was further articulated by another interview participant who described how the work had given them "*an increased rationale*" for changes that they wanted to make and attributed this to the flexibility and the responsiveness of the offer that they had received.

Information sharing was seen as something that was a result of engagement with the work. For example, one interview participant described how, through the review meetings with settings that were part of the work they engaged with, they were able to signpost to settings. This signposting extended beyond the initial signposting of practitioners to settings to include settings to parents, and from practitioners to parents. However, in some cases there was also a recognition that this information sharing relied on personal contacts within agencies rather than a standard practice between agencies possibly requiring a systems change:

"How do we put something in place that isn't dependent on the people in post at the present moment that is a system, a system change".

Focusing on providers, participants described how through the EYSEND work they were engaging with, they were able to offer guidance to settings. When describing the guidance contained within the OAP, one participant highlighted how the guidance within the document enabled settings to offer support to children while waiting for an appointment with a specialist practitioner. By providing this support while waiting for an appointment it meant that opportunities were not lost, and families directly benefited because children were getting support earlier. In this example, the participant described how the guidance within the OAP was similar to what would

have been recommended at initial appointments with specialists because those specialists had provided the strategies when the OAP was developed.

Another example given during one of the interviews was around how the EYSEND work enabled settings to have “*ongoing conversations with parents around children’s next steps, so that that was communicated really effectively and regularly*” (I4).

Echoing this sense of providing guidance and supporting conversations, one of the survey respondents gave the example of how, through engaging with the offer, providers would be better able to support families especially during transition:

“Providers delivering services direct to children and their families feel more able to meet the needs of children with SEND and provide more inclusive provision. They are also more aware of the risks around transition and understand clearly and consistently what a good transition looks like”
(S2).

Participants also described how the EYSEND offer provided practitioners and settings with practical information that they could apply in their setting and with the children they work with:

“We have been able to provide education settings with advice and recommendations that can be implemented to support our youngest children right from the start of their academic journey” (S10).

In another example, provided by an interview participant, this practical information also extended to supporting conversations that setting staff have with parents and encouraging parents to use the same techniques with children at home:

“setting staff can use, particularly SENCOs usually to explain to parents why they’re doing certain strategies with their child at nursery and why if they can the parents can do that as well it will help the child” (I3)

One of the parents also described how they directly benefited from a pack of resources and accompanying information sheet and training as it *“gave us more ideas of what we could do with them at home”*. However, there was also a recognition that sometimes additional training is needed to use tools such as communication books beyond what is offered because of the volume of information shared. Relatedly, in order for this guidance to have maximum impact, one of the survey respondents noted that *“it needs to be accessible to all and easily understood”* (S14). Parents also acknowledged that it was important that their background and existing skills were considered so that they received support that would benefit them. There was a suggestion that coffee and chat sessions that provided a space for open discussion could be helpful. One parent also acknowledged the difference between *“lived experience versus learnt experience”* and how they found interactions easier with other SEND parents:

“I do find it easier to have those encounters with SEND parents who are going through, no one goes through the same journey...but you know there are similarities that spark difference kind of conversation”

While the practitioners acknowledge the importance of family voice, several noted that there was a need for *“better engagement with children and families”* (S2). Trust may act as a potential barrier for engagement as one of the parents described

how trust in professionals could be lost and that a loss of trust can serve as a barrier to engagement. The element of trust also extended to having the confidence to share information and request support through applying for grants which often required information about the family's financial situation.

Measurement of impact requires time and clarity

The 'measurement of impact requires time and clarity' subtheme was reflective of participants' descriptions of how, at the time of completing the interviews or surveys, it felt too early to understand the impact of involvement with the EYSEND offer. For example, several of the participants acknowledged that the *"impacts still probably yet to be seen"* (I4), *"it's still perhaps a bit too early to talk about impact"* (I6), and that to understand the impact it would require exploration with families and settings or follow-up conversations. However, despite feeling that it was too early to assess the impact, one of the participants was confident that this would change with time:

"If I have this conversation with you in six months, I'm hoping that the impact conversation would be different" (I5).

In some cases, there was also a sense of a lack of knowledge of how the changes that had been made as part of the work facilitated by the EYSEND offer translated into tangible impacts for families. For example, participants described how it is difficult to *"quantify"* impact for parents and families with an acknowledgement that it was sometimes difficult to get actionable feedback from families about offers such as the OAP. Despite this challenge, attempts were made to ensure that language contained within documents and in communications were accessible to all, avoided jargon and

acronyms, and resonated with parents. The accessibility of online content related to the EYSEND offer was also highlighted, with all information available within 3-clicks on the computer. One participant also talked about working with families to enable them to see the benefit of the offer and encourage them to access support:

“When we talk about families, particularly with those families with children, with special educational needs, empowering them to make sure that they are making use of provision” (I6)

Alternatively, because the contact with families was indirect and via settings, practitioners suggested that it meant that the *“impact for families would not be massively explicit”* (I4). Instead, it may be that the impact occurred through a more subtle trickledown effect. Echoing this sentiment, one of survey respondents acknowledged that while their work had not been directly with families, the engagement from other stakeholders meant that it was likely to have a positive impact on families:

“Our involvement has not directly involved parents and families, however, full buy-in from all partner professionals will have a positive impact on children and families” (S15).

There was also an acknowledgement by one of the participants that to understand the impact, consideration would also need to be given to the various projects that they were involved with as it can be difficult to disentangle unique impacts. Despite the practitioners holding such beliefs’ it is important to acknowledge that one of the parents described how the training they attended was limited because of a focus on specific barriers or topics meaning that they felt the usefulness of the training was limited. Relatedly, the same parent acknowledged that sometimes

parents may feel reluctant to engage with offers because they would prefer to have more information on the professionals attending and the topics covered so that the offer was “transparent”. The other parent also acknowledged stigma around the family hubs and that there are challenges of engaging with offers as a SEND parent:

“I think the difficult is for me as a SEND parent, and I think for other SEND parents, is putting ourselves out there and kind of taking that step into that environment of being around other SEND parents and being like, right, ok, this is where we’re at”.

Possibly aligned to the parents’ views around the training offer, one of the interview participants reflected on how when training was offered by external parties this appeared to generate “more excitement and more take up” (I5) which they hoped to replicate when they offered training.

Learning curve of setting up, implementing and embedding changes at the system level and settings level

The learning curve of setting up, implementing and embedding changes at the system level and settings level theme reflected that actions were required to embed the changes at both the systems and settings level. The theme comprises two subthemes: (1) system level change and (2) change at the setting level.

System level change

The ‘system level change’ subtheme reflected the participants’ acknowledgement that the EYSEND offer afforded them the opportunity to learn from

others both at a local and a national level. At a local level, through the multi-agency working, participants described how this gave them the opportunity to learn from others, upskill their team, and learn from professionals which could then be shared with settings and families. There was also an acknowledgement that the EYSEND offer provided focus for work in the early years with examples including developing CPD, signposting to different resources, training and websites, and thinking about the next steps for developing provision. One example was given where this focus was facilitated through the short-term nature of the programme offer with training, a review, and moderation. The participant felt that the structure of this offer enabled a setting to put the training into practice. Relatedly another participant acknowledged that the time managed process enabled them to move forward with their activities. Similarly, one of the survey respondents noted that *“the sessions helped to focus thinking and provided workable deadlines”* (S1).

A specific example was given of how through developing the OAP, this facilitated conversations with settings around what should be standard practice and drove system change by settings having to reference how they had followed the OAP in EHCP applications. However, to facilitate the system change it is important that information is *“accessible to all and easily understood”* (S14).

Focusing on the national level, participants described how they found receiving examples of what had been developed in other regions particularly useful as it gave them concrete examples, provided new ideas that had not previously been considered, and allowed them to reflect on what would work in their area:

*“There are all so experienced and so skilled at what they do
that they’re able to say, well this is happening in [location], and*

this is happening in [location], and this is happening in [location] and I think this model would work with [current location]... and we then get to have a look at all of those things and say we don't like that, we do like that, that would work here, that wouldn't work, we could do that but we could do it a bit differently" (I5).

The same participant went on to describe how the facilitated conversations offered by an external provider was seen as something that had a positive impact through providing reassurance and validation of their ideas and plans, ultimately enabling practice to be enhanced:

"It's very validating and I think it really has moved our practice forward in a way that you know we've been able to be confident ourselves and in our relationships, and in our discussions and have very open discussions with each other both in those meetings and outside and beyond those meetings" (I5)

Other participants described how working with the external agencies as part of the EYSEND offer gave them confidence, facilitated work to *"drive it forward"* (I6), and enabled work to *"move at pace"* (S15) because of their experience of other contexts.

Despite the appetite from practitioners to engage with the EYSEND offer they also described the challenges of implementing something new. There was a recognition that when implementing something new it took time and was described as *"a long journey"* (I3). There was also an acknowledgement that part of this challenge stemmed from asking settings to engage in different or extra work:

“But it’s a challenge isn’t it of what we’re asking settings to do that’s different and extra and over and above and how that’s received or how challenging that is, even if they want to receive it well and they want to do it. Sometimes that’s a challenge and a barrier” (I5).

For some these challenges were associated with staff turnover in settings, staff capacity, competing demands and priorities (e.g., the ability of settings to release staff to attend staff training), providers not having clear information about what was required, and location specific challenges that reflected the unique geography of their area. To overcome some of these challenges, the practitioners acknowledged the importance of their relationships with settings and recognising that

“stakeholders shared different service experiences and perspectives which required new relationships and approaches to be developed”.

Other strategies included developing training at times and in ways that would be well received by the sector, using interactive digital collaboration platforms (e.g., padlets), having the OAP as an accessible document and making reference to it when appropriate on visits and in training, sharing information via email to stakeholders and signposting to relevant webpages. Time was also seen as a specific barrier and a recognition that *“everybody’s working capacity is stretched” (I3)*. To overcome this barrier, strategies used included making sure that expectations were clear, agreeing clear actions, planning ahead, allowing some limited flexibility with timelines, having a shared accessible document that several people could work on at once, and supporting virtual attendance at meetings. A slightly different perspective, and a

possible strength of EYSEND offer, around time was that because of the EYSEND offer, it enabled practitioners to carve out time with other agencies to engage in dedicated work.

Change at the setting level

The ‘change at the setting level’ subtheme reflected how change had been brought about within settings because of engaging with the EYSEND offer but also recognised some of the associated challenges. The passion of those who work in settings was highlighted as one of the reasons for changes being implemented:

“our early years settings as a whole are doing this job because they’re passionate about it and they care and they genuinely want to do their best for the children that they work with and the families that they work with” (I4).

This passion and commitment were described by participants as something that was common across the sector and a driver for change. Examples of changes that were given were how the OAP was now seen as the “*first port of call*” for settings, ensuring that the celebratory nature of the work was highlighted, and implementing something concrete following the training that was manageable:

“It becomes a bit more meaningful, and they’ve actually implemented something in their setting. They’re doing something from the training rather than just hearing about it. They’re actually doing it in practice, so they know it’s manageable then” (I4).

Indeed, following the success realised from the models of practice that were developed through the EYSEND offer such as the training, activity, and review format, participants suggested that they would replicate these in future with other work. Additionally, there were plans to create a package or using webinars followed up by a local offer based on experiences of the EYSEND offer.

Training also underpinned many of the changes that were made in settings, with examples given of how through the EYSEND activities workforces within settings were being upskilled through a range of offers including webinars and workshops. However, there was a recognition that:

“people find it very hard to release people to come to training, they’re often at working to ratio and therefore having a person out is a problem” (I6).

Aligning to the challenges associated with training at the setting level, there was also an acknowledgement that one of the challenges associated with embedding change was staff turnover within the sector. One implication for this turnover was that it meant that there was a need to continually foster new relationships. For example, one of the interview participants talked about how the challenge of recruiting and retaining staff within early year settings meant that they had to repeat training to get buy in, in settings where they had previously managed to get buy in:

“in the PVI sector, you could do some training, you could get people on board and then 12 months later that SENCO and that practitioner have left and you’re starting again” (I3).

Summary

In summary, practitioners held very favourable views of the EYSEND offer and appreciated the opportunities to engage in multi-agency working and learn from others both locally and nationally, although they were also aware of the challenges of multi-agency working and engaging in new activities. Many of the practitioners described ways to mitigate these challenges and ensure opportunities to maximise the benefits of multi-agency working were realised. The practitioners also recognised the direct (potential) impact of the EYSEND offer for themselves and settings. However, it appeared that the (potential) impact for families was more indirect, often happening through settings providing support and signposting.

Recommendations:

- 1. Continue to embed multi-agency working.** Multi-agency working was described as having multiple benefits for practitioners, settings, and families.
- 2. To facilitate multi-agency working ensure time commitments, timelines and ways of working are clearly established from the start.** Examples given of where multi-agency working was seen to be most effective was when there were clear agendas, patterns of working, and agreed actions
- 3. Encourage those engaging with the EYSEND offer to develop a plan to capture impact early on in their work.** While the practitioners acknowledged that there would be impact associated with the work, developing a mechanism to encourage practitioners to reflect on how they will assess impact.

- 4. Work with practitioners to gather evidence of impact.** Drawing on the outputs of recommendation 3, consider creating a mechanism for practitioners to share impact as part of their engagement with the EYSEND offer.
- 5. Continue to provide opportunities to gain learning from national examples that can be applied.** The practitioners highlighted the value of having the opportunity to learn from national examples and using these examples to reflect on their practice and what works for their context
- 6. Work with settings to mitigate some of the barriers of engagement.**
The practitioners acknowledged that settings faced several challenges when engaging with the EYSEND offer. Some of these were mitigated by providing clear (and potentially) flexible time scales, agreeing clear actions, flexible ways of engagement, and using technology.

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