

How the Views of Disabled Children are Informing Short Breaks Provision in Enfield

Joint Service for Disabled Children, London Borough of Enfield

What was the problem you were trying to address?

Many of the children we work with at Cheviots which is a specialist Children's Centre have complex disabilities and use non-verbal communication. We wanted to ensure that the services that we provide are the services they want, that our commissioning decisions are the decisions they would want us to make, that we purchase the equipment they want to have, plan outings that they would choose for themselves and that we organise and train our staff to meet their needs and wishes.

However to ensure children and young people with complex communication needs are supported to inform and influence commissioning and service development we needed to come up with a new way of understanding their views.

What did you do to address it?

My colleague Lucy Canton (who is a centre worker) and I designed a new consultation tool, in the form of an observational questionnaire. The questionnaire includes 7 questions and is designed to be completed with each individual child by a member of staff who works with the child and knows them really well. Each questionnaire was completed with the child as part of the activities in their usual after school session or play scheme.

Undertaking the observational questionnaire involves understanding the child's subtle body language, using pictures as a way to support the children to communicate their preferences and observing them in their activities. It also relies on the individual staff member to use their knowledge of the child and the communication skills they have developed to get valuable feedback. The member of staff answered the questions in detail, giving reasons for their answers based on their observations and prior knowledge of the child.

This piece of work was really focused on getting the views of the children. We also do regular consultation with parents and carers but in a different way.



How did it work in practice?

In practice, the observational questionnaire took a lot longer to complete than we had planned. Staff wanted to ensure that they had quality information which meant that they spent a lot of 1:1 time with each child to get as much feedback from them as possible. Staff enjoyed having this 1:1 time and it was clear from the children's responses that they were having a positive experience. We will definitely do it again!

What was outcome?

When we brought all of the data together (from 80 questionnaires) we learned a huge amount about the makeup of the group of children we are working with and what their wants and needs are. We had a strong sense that we were really empowering the children by supporting them to share their views.

The findings from the questionnaire have led us to change the way we structure our groups as the children we work with have extremely different types of needs. We found that some children really benefit from being in a larger group of children with different types of needs whereas some children with multi-sensory needs prefer to have more focused time together in a smaller group. It was also clear that the children benefited from 1:1 time with staff. We have decided to invest in further developing our staff skills by commissioning training on intensive interactions to support enhanced communication, interaction and engagement with all of the children we work with. We are also thinking more creatively about how to structure sessions so that children have both 1:1 and group time.

The views of our children have now informed how we will use our resources. For example, we had planned to invest our resources to buy more equipment for the children to use at the centre however it was overwhelmingly clear that the children would choose to have outings such as swimming, cinema and trips to the seaside which we currently only do occasionally due to the cost. We will need to find a more cost effective way to include these activities in our regular offer for our children.

What are your next steps?

This was a powerful piece of work which we will definitely repeat in the future to inform how we use our resources within the service. We are currently planning how we will implement the findings from the observational questionnaires and are considering how we might replicate the process to inform commissioning and decision making for other settings.

We have always worked hard to get feedback from children and young people, but this project has ensured that we are getting the views of all children. The findings of this consultation have been presented to Enfield's Children with Disabilities Partnership Board, chaired by the Director of Children's Services and attended by the Lead Member for young people with disabilities. Information gathered will be used to inform our future commissioning strategy.

Our learning will be shared at both parent, and young people's forums. It has been published in our local short breaks magazine, and will be shared in Enfield's Local Offer as feedback and an example of continuous improvement.

This resource is part of the Making Participation Work programme, a joint partnership between the Council for Disabled Children and KIDS, and funded by the Department for Education. For more information about the Making Participation Work programme, visit us at:

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/our-work/participation/practice/making-participation-work>



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