



## **Risk, Resilience and Relationships**

### **Supporting SEMH in the early years – A whole staff project**

#### **Impact on practitioners, settings and children.**

##### **The Project - an overview**

The Risk, Resilience and Relationships Project was commissioned by Wandsworth's Early Years and Compliance Lead. The aim of the project was to increase knowledge, confidence and understanding of factors, which impact on young children's social, emotional well-being and mental health and how to support children and families. The project was delivered between November 2018 and July 2019. This report is part of the impact and evaluation. There are also three case studies, which have been gathered between September 2019 and November 2019. There is also a planned follow up event for invited participants to consider further impact and how the project has been embedded into practice.

There were 20 settings identified by the Local Authority who were providing places for increasing numbers of vulnerable two year olds. The settings were invited to an initial meeting where the project was introduced and were asked to make a commitment to the project sessions, carrying out tasks between sessions and providing feedback and embedding this into practice.

There were five settings who attended the initial session, all of who took up and completed the project. The settings who were not able to attend the initial meeting were contacted individually by the LA to introduce the project and the project facilitators.

A total of 14 settings (Appendix 1) and 118 practitioners completed the project.

##### **Content and delivery**

The content was designed to be delivered in short discussion based sessions which included follow up tasks in the setting and also follow up reading and reflection. The sessions were between an hour to one and a half hours long. Some settings joined two sessions together. The sessions were carried out on site at a time that suited each setting. The sessions were held during afternoons, twilights, evenings and Saturdays.

There were six sessions in total with the final session for planning and next steps.

The sessions' content covered:

Session 1 'An introduction to social, emotional and mental health in the early years.'

Session 2 'The importance of relationships in the early years.'

Session 3 'Young children's brain development.'

Session 4 'Recognising stress in young children and supporting resilience.'

Session 5 'Understanding what factors may put a young child's social and emotional development at risk.'

Session 6 Evaluation and impact and next steps

The project sessions were delivered by two in-house (Wandsworth LA) facilitators and four external facilitators each of who have extensive experience and knowledge in the early years.

Each setting had the same facilitator for every session. This was a key part of the delivery so that trust and confidence could be built across the period of time of the project. Each facilitator was equipped with the same resources for each session, which could be used flexibly to meet the learning needs of the practitioners in the sessions. The resources included slides, film clips and visual images used as 'Talking Mat's', which could be used to stimulate discussion and also be duplicated and left with the setting as reminders. The facilitators collected information about the practitioners preferred ways of learning and used the resources to reflect this.

### **Post project evaluation and impact**

All participants were asked to complete a pre and post project Impact and evaluation questionnaire.

The practitioners were asked to give quantitative feedback in relation to their understanding, knowledge and confidence between 1-5 in relation to the five topics. (Appendix 3).

They were also asked to rate the quality of delivery of each session on a scale between 1- 10. The sessions were rated 8 and above by 86% of the participants. (Appendix 2)

They were then asked for qualitative feedback in relation to:

- How the project has supported practitioner's development and whole setting practice.
- An example of how this has been used to support a child.
- How it can support engagement with parents and carers.
- How the settings intend to continue developing understanding and embedding practice

There were a total of 118 participants who provided feedback in relation to the project. These responses have been collated and each setting has their own feedback. The settings were also asked to develop their own action plan, which they could refer back to.

#### **Quantative responses:**

Overall all practitioners identified that they had an increased understanding, knowledge and confidence across all of the topics covered. The greatest increase was seen in relation to session 1 'The introduction to social and emotional health in the early years'. The second largest increase was for session 4 'Recognising stress in young children and supporting resilience.' Session 3 'Young children's brain development' and 5 'Understanding what factors may put a young child's social, emotional development at risk' had very similar levels of increase. There was less of an increase noted following session 2 'The importance of relationships in the early years' (see Appendix 1 detail).

*Thoughts/Comments relating to the differences in impact of the different topics*  
*Looking at the overall increases in relation to the project topics. It is of interest that the topic of the importance of relationships had less of an increase overall than other topics. This may be related to the existing priority given to associated themes such as the 'key person' 'Positive Relationships' and in particular working closely with parents. This seems to indicate that where the topics relate to aspects of the EYFS and familiar documents and policies there is a more established knowledge base and greater confidence.*

*The greatest increase is seen in relation to the topic of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). This could be linked to practioners are much less familiar with this topic. Although knowledge and understanding in relation to PSED is part of the EYFS, the specific and perhaps considered more 'specialist' knowledge base relating to SEMH is relatively new and less well understood. This may also be the case in relation to recognising stress and understanding resilience. These topics are relatively new areas of interest and therefore may be areas of future interest and development.*

*The topics relating to brain development and the risk factors there has been a growing body of and accessible resources available for early years practitioners to access and some practitioners may have started their CPD journey in relation to these topics.*

## **Summary of qualitative feedback**

### **Practitioner development and whole setting practice: –**

The information gathered from the post project questions showed a wide range of examples in which the project had supported whole setting practice.

There were many examples given of how practice had changed and improved in relation to spending time observing and gaining a better understanding of children's needs.

*'Importance of observing children and improved practice in using observations to inform practice and support emotional wellbeing.'*

*'The different needs that children are trying to communicate. Has made me reflect on my interactions with my key children to actually find out more about their emotional state of mind.'*

There were several references to adults increased recognition the importance of giving children time in situations where children were upset, anxious and distressed.

Comments included *'I now stand back and give the child space and time to calm down'*.

*'Noticing when a child is struggling to separate from their parents- giving them space and security to be angry then calm and become able to play alongside an adult with support. Later to reflect how they were feeling and it's ok to feel that way.'*

Examples were also given in relation to settling in, transitions and at times when children were demonstrating high levels of emotional distress throughout the day.

*' During my practice I was able to help a particular child with problem solving, she was deeply distressed and not being chosen for an activity, we talked about taking turns and doing all of the activities, this helped her face a challenge as well as her perseverance.'*

There were examples of how there was a deeper understanding of children's emotions.

*'We have given more time to discussions around emotions.'*

*'When writing end of year reports I have put a big focus on children's emotional wellbeing and put key information on what cues children give,'*

There were examples of how the project had supported practitioners to unpick some of the behaviours which were concerning them and approach these by meeting the needs of children rather than addressing the behaviour on its own.

*'Using the iceberg (analysis) to better understand underlying causes of behaviour and wider emotions.'*

*'Acknowledge children's communication attempts around behaviour'*

There were a number of comments, which related to practitioners feeling more confident to engage with children in moments of heightened emotions to support them with their emotions and use language to help the child relate to what they are feeling.

*' have on the spot discussions with children. I thought that children would need me to model talking about emotions but I found that they were sharing and showing me emotions all of the time.'*

Being able to identify when levels of stress and anxiety is building for children was considered to be a useful way of identifying how children can be supported by adults who notice this. Also how that the adults can actively reduce levels of stress and anxiety for a child.

*'I am more confident to see different levels of stress in a child'*

*'To support and bring stress levels and anxiety down.'*

The importance of the role of the key person was also reflected upon and particularly how the building of relationships takes time and how important it is to get to know each child individually.

*'Recognising the crucial role that the key person has in forming attachment relationships with children to promote a safe and secure environment for learning.'*

One setting had identified at the beginning of the project that they hoped the project would help them 'to work better as a team'. Looking at the responses following the project the following comments were made:

*'Improved team working and coming together to solve problems.'*

*'Importance of giving staff time.'*

*'Listening to staff and listening to each other.'*

The impact and importance of team was also noted by other settings. It was evident that there was a collective benefit to the whole team being involved in the sessions over a period of time, with opportunities to discuss with each other their thoughts and ideas and use reflection.

*'This project has really helped to encourage reflection amongst staff and support and use techniques.'*

*'Lots of conversations have been had and reflective conversations are being heard in classrooms.'*

*'We are using the Gibbs reflective cycle to reflect individually and as a whole staff team.'*

### **Impact on children: -**

It is important when considering the impact on children that it is done with caution as impact on children is inextricably linked to the impact on the practitioners and how this influences and changes their practice. Where practitioners reflect and gain a greater awareness of their influence on children's social, emotional mental health and wellbeing this can be an indication of the potential impact on a child.

The following comment demonstrates an insight, which has great potential for positive impact on children.

*'Understanding our own behaviour and how this can affect children's responses.'*

Other examples of how practitioners have supported children include helping a child to settle in, spending more time getting to know a child where the practitioner was aware may be facing challenges at home.

*'I started to make more of an effort to get to know her and also always show affection and cuddles when needed and I feel this has an impact as the child will come to me.'*

Other settings have adopted approaches which they see have a positive impact on children.

*'One child now regularly comes to find emotion fans and looking through them helps him calm down.'*

*'I have taken a different approach to consoling a child and gave time to the child to self-regulate.'*

*'I understand one of the children's behaviours and helped him, which was successful. He is more calm and social.'*

*'Judging situations, knowing when to stand back or support by being there to help or guide.'*

*'Continue to give children lots of affection and time to talk and listen and comfort when needed and find ways to help children through building relationships and their interests.'*

*'Strategies to support my practice such as serve and return'*

*'Serve and return has made me more mindful of returning, acknowledging children even when dealing with another child.'*

*'Using serve and return to support children to problem solve, develop confidence and persevere.'*

These comments indicate that practitioners were beginning to develop a better understanding of how to contribute to the development of strong social, emotional wellbeing and mental health.

### **Support and engaging with parents and carers:-**

Part of the role of practitioners in early year's settings is to work in partnership with parents. Some of the settings involved had specific members of staff who offered parental and family support and there were many who recognised that in order to support the development of social, emotional wellbeing and mental health, this must also involve the parents.

Practitioners were asked to reflect on how the project had supported them in relation to engaging with parents. The responses identified an increased confidence in speaking to parents about their children and reinforced the importance of building and strengthening relationships with parents from the start, particularly during settling in. It was also considered important to build a strong relationship in order to gain a good understanding of the child's development and the family context.

Sharing information about topics such as resilience, attachment and understanding children's behaviour were areas that practitioners felt more confident to engage in.

*'Talking to our nursery parents about resilience in childhood'*

*'Inform parents on strategies and information they could use at home.'*

*'Using the iceberg model to speak to parents who are struggling to understand and support their child's behaviour.'*

*'Talking to parents about their relationships with the children, e.g. connection seeking rather than attention seeking.'*

There were also a number of comments, which referred to a greater understanding of the potential impact of stress and adverse experiences on children's development.

*'Improved understanding of family circumstances that can impact on children's SEMH.'*

*'Improved knowledge of toxic stress, ACES's and impact on children's development.'*

*'The project has made me think more deeply about the children's social emotional and mental health and the impact their experiences have on their development.'*

### **Continuing to develop and embed an understanding of Risk, Resilience and Relationships**

The final part of the impact and evaluation was to encourage all settings and all practitioners to think about how they would continue their learning and also transferring this in to practice. Each setting devised an action plan, which they retained.

The responses to this were wide ranging and included:

- Referring back to notes and reading items shared during the project.
- Undertaking further personal research into specific topics.

- Putting SEMH on regular staff meeting agendas.
- Modelling and using strategies from the course.
- Implementation into medium term planning
- Increased focus on observations
- Increase focus on PSED in reports and transitions
- Regular discussions with colleagues to reflect on and use the knowledge more widely and consistently.
- Sharing with parents and other professionals
- Professional reflection
- Further training

The impact of the project reflected in this report is directly related to the commitment and enthusiasm of the practitioners who engaged with it. The practitioners who have been involved have taken a professional journey to discover what they can do to promote strong social emotional well-being and mental health for young children and their families. These practitioners and settings can provide examples and be role models for others. The longer-term impact of the project will lead from recognising the work and commitment that has already taken place.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1.** List of participating settings and facilitators

**Appendix 2.** Summary quality of delivery

**Appendix 3.** (See separate document). Summary of pre and post feedback  
'Understanding, knowledge and confidence in relation to the topics covered

## **Appendix 1**

### **Participating settings**

Alton Community Playschool  
Balham Nursery School and Children's Centre  
Bees Knees  
Eastwood Day Nursery and Nursery School  
Fledglings Early Years (DERINTON ROAD)  
Lavender Hill Day Nursery  
Learning Ladders Early Years  
Little Linguists Nursery School  
Little Stepping Stones Day Nurseries  
Precious Jewels Nursery  
St Mary's Summerstown Montessori Nursery School  
Somerset Nursery School and Children's Centre  
Storm Family Centre Limited  
York Gardens Nursery

### **Facilitators**

Alison Strickland  
Iraklis Kolokotronis  
Julie Revels  
Maria Mockett  
Pam Sokhi  
Sue Fisher

## Appendix 2

### Quality of training delivery.

Sessions which were rated at 8 or above (On a scale of 1 to 10) across all 5 sessions expressed as a percentage.

Setting A	97.2%
Setting B	98.4%
Setting C	80.9%
Setting D	91.1%
Setting E	93.7%
Setting F	62.8%
Setting G	100.0%
Setting H	100.0%
Setting I	94.4%
Setting J	57.5%
Setting K	85.3%
Setting L	93.3%
Setting M	100.0%
Setting N	100.0%
<b>Setting O</b>	90.0%
	<b>Average 89.6%</b>