

## Person Centred Approaches – Yes, you can use them in Early Years!

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To support schools, parent carers and professionals in the development of person centred approaches the Local Authority arranged for a 2 day training session in Person Centred Planning to learn about creative Person Centred Planning tools such as a PATH.

The SENCo from Northlands Wood Primary attended this course and since then, has been using these tools for EHCP applications, and for meetings with children with significant needs. This report shares our experience of using it for an Early Years Annual Review.

### The View of the School's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo)

"I first encountered the idea of Person Centered Planning at a West Sussex meeting run by Inclusive Solutions. I had two immediate responses: first, 'this looks an amazing way to get at children's views', and second, 'how on earth would that fit in with the EHCP paperwork?!'.

"At a further training day I was the guinea pig in having a PATH done on me. Without my family and friends with me, it was slightly artificial, but the fact that the PATH I took home with me was nevertheless representative of me and my goals gave me huge confidence in the process. I was fully committed after this session to try it. However, I wished I'd had another member of staff trained with me as it is a two person job. I volunteered to help another SENCo, and to have a colleague observe. In my first ever PATH, the child actually asked if he could take it home and put it on his wall. What a brilliant introduction for my colleague!

"We went back to school and tried it with a child who did not, and would not, get an EHCP, and it led to some really clear and achievable actions to help her with transition to KS3. We then decided to introduce it into our Annual Reviews – starting with children in Early Years, who previously have not really been able to give us their views and we have relied more on the adults around them."

### Bella's\* Annual Review

The first part of a person centred review focuses on the child's hopes and dreams. In this section we asked all the grown-ups at the meeting what they wanted for Bella – these were things that were specific and short term (eating lunch in the hall) and more abstract and long term (being independent, being happy). Bella was not really able to participate fully in this section, but she was able to say she wanted friends and so we drew her with friends and love. As the adults stated their hopes and dreams, we checked in with Bella before we included each of them in the graphic.



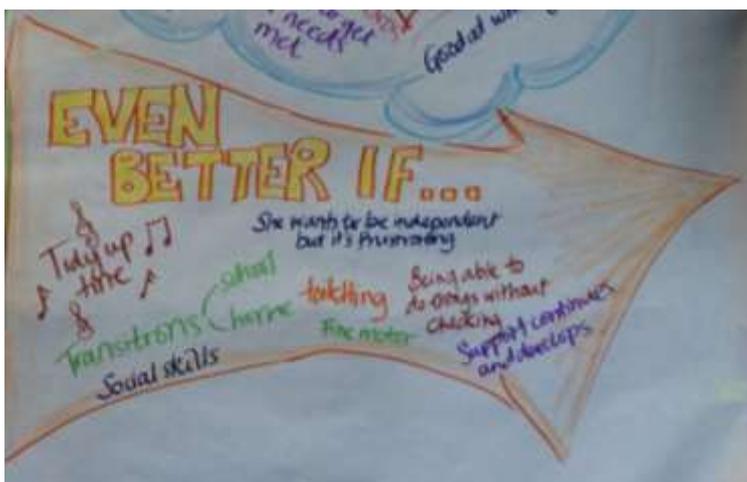


In the second part of the review, we looked at Bella's 'gifts and strengths'. This helps all concerned think about Bella without the lens of a 'deficit model'. This is crucial, not only for the self-esteem of the child, but also for beginning to suggest possible sources of help and support, or of engagement. It was really helpful here to have photos of Bella which both the school adults and her parents had been asked to bring.

A standard part of our reviews for a long time has been discussion of 'what's working well?'. This was made more effective through the inclusion of photos and examples of work. It was particularly helpful for us to include examples from home and school as it helped build a sense of a team around Bella, and develop our shared sense of purpose. As a school we feel this is so important to the success we have with children with SEN.



Bella really enjoyed seeing the photos of herself enjoying activities and with people who are important to her. She was involved in sticking them to the paper.



The 'even better if' section was later used to inform our completion of the short term targets for Bella's plan for the coming year. Coming from the perspective of really knowing Bella and sharing, not only what was working, but why, we were able to get a really clear idea of what success would look like.

We envisage that next year we will be able to illustrate this with examples of success so that Bella will see how she is progressing towards the goals we share.

## Reflections on the process

Talking to Bella's parents afterwards, we all felt that this was a really positive way to explore Bella's strengths. It helped us feel that we work together as a team, and see how all our actions contribute to positive outcomes for Bella. Bella was really involved in sticking on her photos and talking about them in a way that has not been the case previously for such young children and we are excited about continuing to develop this approach in our annual reviews.

The key part was the preparation and asking all to bring photos to the review so that Bella could 'see herself' in the review process. Another factor in the success of this approach is the positive feedback given by the West Sussex SEN team in welcoming this kind of evidence as part of the EHCP paperwork.

\*The name of the child has been changed to protect identify.