



mencap NI

Mencap NI Briefing Paper No.6

Good practice in early development support for children with a learning disability

August 2023

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In Northern Ireland there are approximately¹:



A **learning disability** is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities. Learning disabilities are diverse in nature, ranging from mild to moderate, to more severe and profound. With the right support, most people with a learning disability can lead fulfilled lives.²

The term '**developmental delay**' or '**global developmental delay**' is used when a child takes longer to reach certain development milestones than other children their age.

This might include learning to walk or talk, movement skills, learning new things, and interacting with others socially and emotionally.³

Early intervention is the provision of support to ensure optimal child development during early childhood (0-6 years), including specific interventions and programmes to improve child and family outcomes, and contact with services across education, health, and social care.⁴

Introduction

Mencap's vision is a future in which the UK is the best place in the world for people with a learning disability to lead happy and healthy lives. Early support from birth, and in the first five years, is essential for the positive start in life that is strongly associated with better outcomes in adulthood. However, the levels of access for children with a learning disability to early support services often do not correspond to levels of need. Many parents that we talk to highlight delays with diagnosis and Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessments, and a lack of respite provision.

Parents also find it difficult to access suitably inclusive and high quality childcare, family support and parenting programmes. These services play a significant role in raising educational outcomes, and in providing parents with practical skills to support their child's learning and development. It is therefore concerning that mainstream provision is often unable to meet their needs; with key factors including a lack of learning disability awareness amongst professionals.

This paper outlines what Mencap NI has been doing through research, training and evaluation to extend the evidence base on good practice in supporting young children with a learning disability. It includes the findings of a UK-wide study on access to early support; an overview of the specialist services Mencap provides for young children and families in Northern Ireland; and results from an evaluation of our workforce training model. In particular, the paper focuses on supporting the important role of early years professionals by equipping them with the knowledge and specialist skills they need to effectively support the early development of children with a learning disability.

¹ These estimates have been calculated using learning disability prevalence rates from Public Health England (2016) and population data from the Office for National Statistics (2021).

² www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/what-learning-disability

³ www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/conditions/global-development-delay

⁴ Definition used in study of access to early intervention and supports for children with developmental disabilities (Sapiets et al., 2022).

Policy Context

More than ever, children in Northern Ireland with a learning disability need to be recognised as a priority group within health, education, and family policy to ensure their rights are protected. Budget cuts, Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis have exacerbated the existing inequalities that they, and their families, experience. Growing financial pressures on many carers, who already faced above average household bills linked to their caring role, has negatively impacted on their physical and/or mental health (Carers NI, 2022).

Mencap NI previously highlighted that, despite their risk of poorer outcomes, children with a learning disability and their families are traditionally under-represented in key policy areas, and face many barriers to early intervention services (Webb & Kelly, 2018). Concerns about the lack of early identification and intervention within an over-stretched and failing SEN system (NICCY, 2020) underpin significant shortfalls in special school places, including nursery placements. A recent UK-wide study of families access to early support for children with developmental disabilities found evidence of significant unmet need (Sapiets et al., 2022).

In Northern Ireland, following the pandemic, parents of children with disabilities particularly felt they were not getting enough support (Parenting NI, 2021), and delays in health assessments for children with SEN and disabilities blocked access to early intervention (Children's Law Centre, 2022). The independent review of children's social care in Northern Ireland has reported long waiting lists for some services, especially for children with a disability, noting also that they are "too time limited or, as with respite care, heavily rationed or not available at all" (Jones, 2023, p.68).

In the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive and functioning Assembly,⁵ progress on the implementation of essential mental health (including infant mental health); early learning and childcare; and disability strategies has been paused. There is also "no imminent prospect of the equivalent funding that has been allocated to childcare in England being ring-fenced for childcare in Northern Ireland" (All Party Group on Early Education and Childcare, June 2023).

Notably, 87% of parents in NI who have a child with a disability consider there is insufficient provision of one or more types of affordable childcare in their area, compared with 69% of all parents (Employers for Childcare, 2021). In Mencap's experience, parents of children with a learning disability also find it more difficult to access childcare, as limited settings offer the requisite level of specialist support to meet their child's specific and additional needs.

Article 23 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that children with a learning disability have a right to support in their early years which enables them to learn, grow and feel included.

⁵ Government is not in place at time of writing.

Early intervention

There is a well-established body of evidence highlighting the effectiveness of investing early in a child's life to positively shape the developing brain.⁶ This is especially important for children with a learning disability, who have delays in their cognitive and adaptive skills, and are more likely to experience educational, health and social inequalities, and emotional and behavioural difficulties.⁷



PROTECTS INFANT MENTAL HEALTH



IMPROVES RESILIENCE



IS COST EFFECTIVE



BOOSTS ACHIEVEMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES



LEADS TO BETTER SOCIAL, HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Early support across education, health, and social care services, and specific interventions and programmes to improve child and family outcomes, is therefore key. This includes programmes aimed at strengthening relationships between babies and their parents/carers, and through early years professionals who support children's brain development via the educational activities and experiences they provide. Evidence shows that young children benefit significantly from relationships with other responsive caregivers outside the family (Center on the Developing Child).

⁶ See Early Intervention Foundation <https://www.eif.org.uk/why-it-matters/how-do-we-know-it-works>; Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/>; and Stronger from the Start Alliance www.barnardos.org.uk/northern-ireland/influencing/stronger-from-the-start.

⁷ See evidence in Challenging Behaviour Foundation (2022); and Webb & Kelly (2018).



Lack of training

Unfortunately, there is often a lack of knowledge and understanding about special educational needs and of the SEN system amongst professionals working within it, including some educators (Purdy et al, 2019). A skills deficit and limited learning disability awareness is also evident across the range of early support services (Sapiets et al, 2022), and amongst the healthcare workforce (Mencap, 2018). Additionally, in our experience, there is a lack of training on learning disability for youth workers (Webb & Woods, 2023), and professionals working within the early years sector.

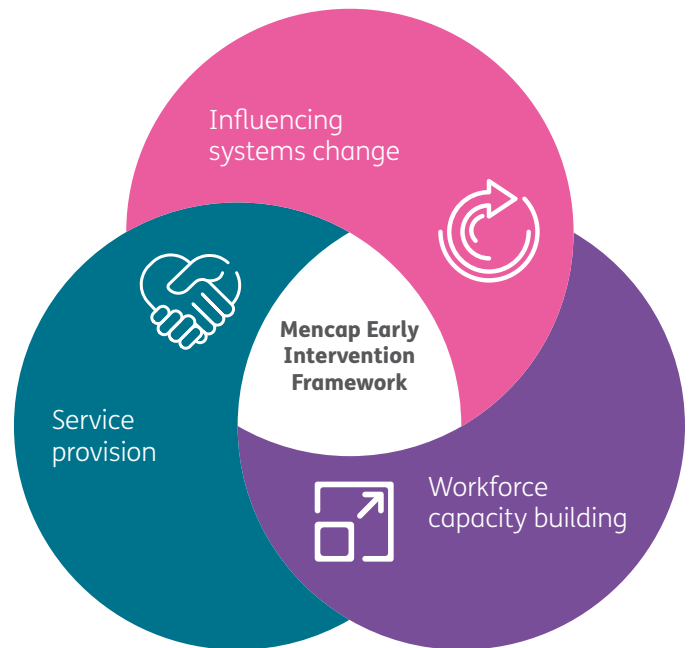
We know from our direct work, that staff working in early years settings are generally very dedicated and passionate about inclusion, and want to support children with additional needs. However, content on learning disability in early years undergraduate courses / professional training can be limited and fairly basic. As a result, graduates may not be suitably equipped when they enter practice to support children with a learning disability and their families in the way they would like, compounded by a lack of access to professional development in this area.

Good practice

As demonstrated in ‘Creating Brighter Futures’ (Webb & Kelly, 2018), all Mencap’s early intervention work in Northern Ireland is delivered within an evidence-informed framework of programmes and activities.

In addition to influencing systems change and service provision, Mencap NI has expanded our delivery to include workforce capacity building.

Based around these three key themes, we aim to ensure young children with a learning disability, and their families, have better opportunities to access early support services which meet their needs



1) Influencing systems change

Participation in policy and practice networks



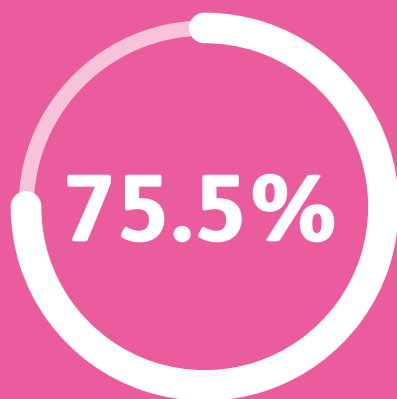
Feasibility studies/
Randomised
Controlled Trials



Research partnerships

Research – Families’ access to early intervention and support for children with developmental disabilities (Sapiets et al, 2022).

Funded through the Warwick Collaborative Postgraduate Research Scholarship scheme, Mencap partnered with Warwick University, Cerebra, and Ambitious about Autism in a three year UK-wide research study, to understand more about families’ experience of accessing early support. 673 parental caregivers of children aged 0-6 years with diagnosed or suspected developmental disabilities (DD) completed the survey, including 71 parents from Northern Ireland.



75.5%
of participants reported
an unmet need for early
support

Key findings (Sapiets et al, 2022)

- Across the UK, early support was accessed from a diverse range of professionals and services within education, health, and social care. However, the study found evidence of significant unmet need, and several common barriers and facilitators of access perceived by families (Examples at Table 1).
- The lack of professional knowledge about developmental disabilities was a notable barrier which prevented recognition of need, prevented or delayed identification of need, and reduced the referring or signposting on to early support services.
- Significant areas of unmet needs included:
 - Assessment and / or provision of supports for DD and associated needs, for example, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, educational psychology, SEN assessment, behaviour support, and sleep support.
 - Family support / short breaks.
 - General health services, for example, paediatrics and dentistry.

Table 1: Access to early support services for families of children with developmental disabilities (Sapiets et al, 2022)

Barriers	Facilitators
Lack of sufficient services Under-resourced; limited capacity; inflexible; lack of continuity of support.	Supportive and competent professionals Positive attitude/engagement style; proactive support; knowledgeable.
Unhelpful professionals Limited knowledge of developmental delay and services; negative engagement / actions with parents.	Empowered parental caregivers Skills; knowledge of services and developmental delay; access to resources (financial, travel); proactive behaviours; support from others.
Complex service system Lack of coordination, collaboration, service information, accountability for access.	Accessible services Delivery features (e.g., location), flexibility, resources (e.g., childcare), financial set-up (free, low-cost), availability, continuity of provision.



2) Service provision

Early Development Support

Mencap NI provides an Early Development Support programme for 52 children aged 2-3 with significant developmental delay, which supports their transition to nursery school.

In partnership with the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT), the programme offers play, therapy and care within our multi-purpose Children's Centre.

An onsite team of BHSCT allied health professionals provides Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy, alongside the Mencap Early Years team who create tailored learning plans and activities according to each child's interests, abilities and needs.





Key strategies and evidence-based approaches are used to maximise children's potential:

- A minimum of one early years worker to three children provides the quality time and care that is essential for children with a learning disability to meet more of their developmental milestones.
- Children's different support requirements are catered for within three specially designed and organised play-zone areas.
- Children's developmental progress in terms of their cognitive, physical and social abilities is assessed using the HighScope approach as a framework.
- Staff utilise good practice programmes such as Attention Autism, Elklan, Tac Pac, PECs, Intensive Interaction, Makaton and TEACCH.

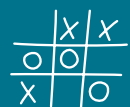


Family Support



The Mencap NI Family Support Service supports families with children aged 0 to 7 with a learning disability, global developmental delay and / or autism. Provision includes:

- Parenting support programmes
- Parent counselling service
- Skills-based workshops
- Information sessions
- Family play days
- Summer schemes.



E-PAtS (**Early Positive Approaches to Support**) was developed by Dr Nick Gore and Dr Jill Bradshaw at the University of Kent. It is an 8-week family support programme covering key areas including communication, challenging behaviours, sleep and carer well-being. The programme is co-facilitated by trained professionals and family carers who have lived experience of raising a child with additional needs.

To influence system change, and following initial participation in a feasibility study, the service will be working with families in Northern Ireland as part of a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) led by the University of Kent. The UK-wide study will include around 500 families, and explore the value to parents of attending E-PAtS sessions.



3) Workforce capacity building















Within limited resources, Mencap developed an Early Years Training Programme to address gaps in professional knowledge, and build workforce capacity. This includes several non-accredited short courses ranging in length between 2 – 10 hours, covering key topics aimed at improving understanding about supporting children with a learning disability, and their families. We recently expanded this provision by designing, and piloting, a 9 week accredited OCN Level 2 award which is suitable for early years professionals supporting children aged 0-5 years.

As shown in Case Studies 1 and 2, we have also developed a successful collaboration with the NI Childminding Association (NICMA) and the Childcare Partnerships to maximise the reach of our training to early years practitioners working in the following early years settings:

- Statutory pre-school
- Private day care nursery
- Early intervention services (e.g., Sure Start)
- Childminders/approved home childcare/nanny
- Playgroups



50 courses
delivered to
702 early years
professionals

Mencap NI Early Years Training Programme 2020– 2023		
Course	Learning	Completed
Introduction to learning disability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 hours • In-person or online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definitions and terminology • A family's journey through diagnosis • Working in partnership with parents • Navigating the system: services / how to access • Challenges and barriers 	 11 courses  146 people
Supporting children with a learning disability in early years settings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 hours or 2 x 3 hour sessions • In-person or online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing sensitive news with parents • Sensory integration / processing / exploratory play • Challenging behaviour / Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) 	 15 courses  229 people
The importance of wellbeing: supporting children with a learning disability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 hours or 2 x 2.5 hour sessions • In-person or online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory of wellbeing / impact on children • Strategies and initiatives, and how to adapt for children with a learning disability • Strategies to support wellbeing within the classroom, and adapting for use at home 	 7 courses  87 people
Global Developmental Delay (GDD) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 hours • In-person or online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of GDD • Impact on a child's learning and development • Strategies to support young children with GDD • Referral pathways / role of the early years professional 	 6 courses  115 people
OCN NI Level 2 - Learning disability: positive support in the early years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 weeks x 3 hours (In-person/online) • Weeks 1 - 6 Taught sessions • Weeks 7 – 8 Independent study • Week 9 Reflection / evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to learning disability • Supporting parents and their wellbeing • Creating an inclusive environment • Communication • Sensory integration and processing • Managing challenging behaviours with PBS 	 4 courses  48 people
Breaking Barriers - Train the Trainer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 hours (2 x 5 hour sessions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional / international perspectives of inclusive care • Partnership and multidisciplinary working • Supporting holistic needs • A family's journey through diagnosis • Navigating the system: services / how to access • Creating inclusive environments 	 1 course  7 people
Breaking Barriers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 hours • Facilitated by NICMA Development and Engagement Officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to learning disability • Professional support: roles and responsibilities • The importance of an enabling environment • The significance of a Child Profile • Building partnerships with parents/other professionals 	 6 courses  70 people

Case Study 1 – NICMA

The Northern Ireland Childminding Association (NICMA) works to promote quality childcare within home-based settings throughout Northern Ireland. The organisation offers a variety of training which allows childminders to increase their knowledge and skills. In consultation with childminders, NICMA identified that barriers to caring for children with additional needs can include:

- Lack of training
- Lack of (more expensive) specialist equipment, and home adaptations.
- Potential loss of income (looking after fewer children in order to provide specialist care).

In response, NICMA engages in various partnerships and initiatives aimed at expanding the provision of home childcare

to more children with additional needs. This includes working with Mencap NI to ensure childminders can access specialist training on supporting children with learning disabilities / complex needs.

Three benefits of the partnership between NICMA and Mencap NI include:

- Childminders have gained greater awareness and understanding about the different needs of children with a learning disability, and their families.
- Childminders have learned information to equip them with a ‘toolkit’ of activities, strategies and resources to better support children with a learning disability.
- Using a ‘Train the Trainer’ approach, some NICMA staff have been trained to deliver courses.

“The training with Mencap NI has given many childminders the necessary knowledge and skills to support children with additional needs, and enhance the care they provide to create a more inclusive environment. Watching how childminders communicate and play with children who have additional needs has a positive, ripple effect on other children who also learn how to engage.”

**Patricia Lewsley-Mooney
(CBE), NICMA CEO**



Case Study 2 – Childcare Partnerships

Childcare Partnerships (CCP) offer information and support to childcare providers, parents and employers. Ashleigh Brown works within the CCP training team, providing training opportunities for practitioners working within registered childcare settings across Northern Ireland. The team regularly consults with the childcare sector to establish their training needs, and learning disability is an area often highlighted.

“When we talked through things with Mencap, we felt that they really had good expertise in the subject area. We were looking for those shorter three to six hour courses that practitioners could come to, and maybe for people who had no experience at all of additional needs or learning disability. A lot of the staff come along, and they’re maybe working with children one to one, and they just want to know a wee bit more. They want to feel more confident.”

“It started off as a kind of pilot. It was only a couple of courses, and the demand was really huge. Then practitioners were coming up with things that they wanted like Global Development Delay and the importance of emotional wellbeing, and they were two courses that we wouldn’t have run at the beginning.”

Over the last three years, Mencap has designed and delivered more courses to meet the needs of practitioners. **Three benefits** of the partnership between CCP and Mencap NI include:



Good mix of courses: “It’s nice to have a mix of accredited training and those shorter courses, and then people can build their skills if they’ve maybe done a couple of the shorter courses and they feel they might need, or they might want to go on and have, a qualification behind them.”

Flexibility: “A lot of the courses that Mencap deliver for us are only three to six hours. We’re able to deliver them in the evening times which suits the working patterns of early years practitioners. They are able to be done online now is a huge benefit for people.”

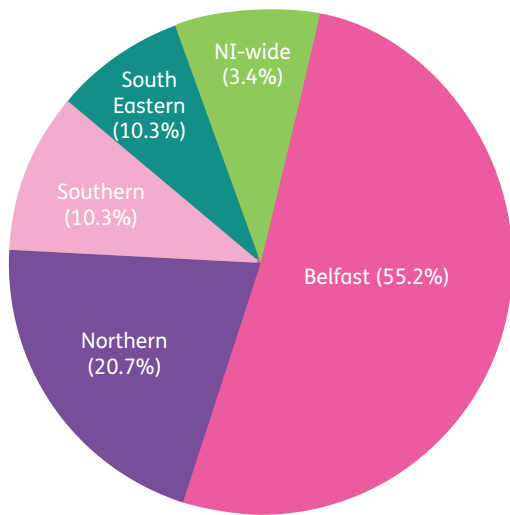
Facilitators are parents of children with a learning disability: “Where the parent comes into some of the sessions and gives a bit of an overview, that’s a real life experience. Participants really seem to understand more getting that kind of feedback, and it’s a bit unique as well.”

Training evaluation

Demonstrating outcomes is an important component of our model, so that we can establish the quality and relevance of the training for the early years sector, and make continuous improvements. Our pilot OCN and short courses have been independently evaluated, including a mix of focus groups and case studies with delivery partners and training participants. Results suggest the training is relevant to practitioners' roles, and effective in improving their competences and confidence in supporting children with a learning disability. They also suggest there is a high demand for more training in this area.

Evaluation – OCN (NI) Level 2 Award

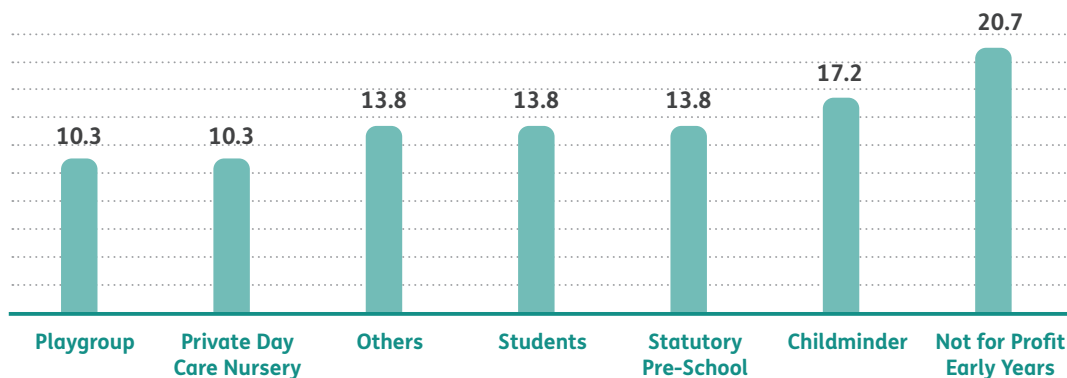
Figure 1: % Participants by Health and Social Care Trust



The OCN Level 2 'Learning Disability: Positive Support in the Early Years' course ran three times during the pilot period with a total of 36 participants from a range of early years settings, working across all regions of Northern Ireland.

A mixed method approach was used in the evaluation (Kernaghan, 2023). This comprised an online survey at the final reflection session, completed by 29 participants; and three focus groups with 28 participants.

Figure 2: % Background of early years practitioners



62.1%

of learners had not received any specific training on learning disability in their role as an early years practitioner prior to this course.

100%

of learners agreed that after completing the course, their understanding of how to support children with a learning disability had increased.

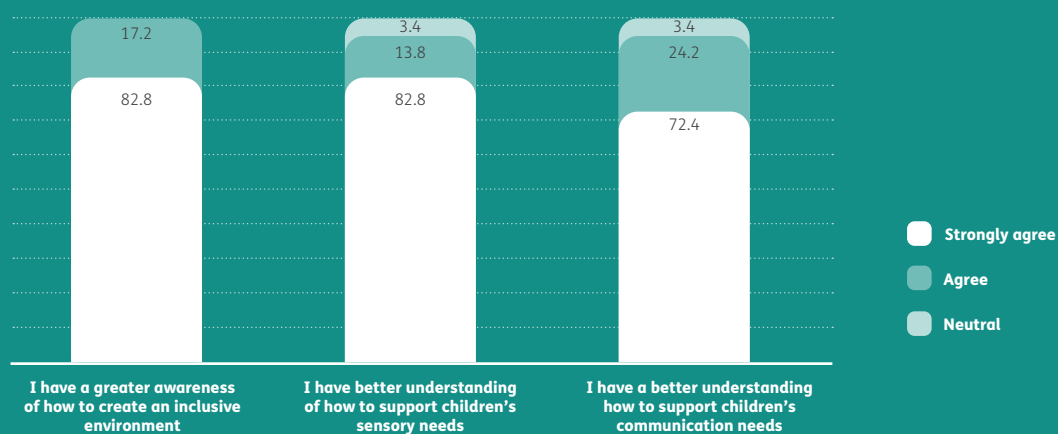
100%

of learners agreed the course was:

- Facilitated well
- Of high quality
- Very relevant to their work in early years.

Many learners recognised that there were a growing number of children with a learning disability in their setting, and they wanted to learn appropriate strategies and approaches to meet their needs. As shown in Figure 3, the majority agreed that after taking the course, they had a greater awareness of how to create an inclusive environment for children with a learning disability (100%); and a better understanding of how to support their sensory needs (96.6%) and communication needs (96.6%).

Figure 3: % Participants awareness and understanding of supporting children with a learning disability



Learning outcomes

Inclusive environment: Learners that attended the OCN Level 2 course in the Mencap NI Children's Centre had since restructured their own space to create a more inclusive environment for children with a learning disability, who were now better engaged in play, and calmer.

"The course taught me that less is more especially when it comes to children feeling very overwhelmed that would have sensory processing."

(Director, Charity)

“...we have restructured the day so that they get movement and then a sit down, then a movement then a sit down to try and meet those sensory needs, and it has really helped the flow of the day. The kids are a lot less agitated when you get them to sit down.”

(Practitioner, Special School)

Sensory integration and processing:

Learners found it especially useful to learn about two other senses, proprioception and vestibular sense, which control body awareness, balance and spatial orientation. This was the first time many had heard this terminology.

Communication: Learners reported gaining a greater understanding that all behaviour is a form of communication, and some had already adopted a variety of communication aids.

“After communication week, we started intensive interaction with one of the kids in our class who is struggling with his language development, and he has come on leaps and bounds since we started that. You can see the connection he is making even though he doesn't have the words.”

(Classroom Assistant, Special School)

“It gives us insight into how the parents as well as the child and all the emotions they could feel like sad at the very start, they could be in denial, they could feel guilty. There are so many things and I think it is important to know that because later on down the line, one of us may have to break the news to a parent. I think this course has really taught us to do this in a sensitive and also serious way.”

(Early Years Student)

Support for parents: The majority of learners (96.6%) reported that the OCN Level 2 course had increased their understanding of how to support parents of children with a learning disability, and several had already shared resources with them.

Case Study 3 – SEN Space Care and Respite Services

SEN Space offer support and respite services for children with disabilities and their families. Evolving all the time, provision currently includes an after-school scheme, sibling support, weekend clubs, school holiday programmes, a youth club, and parent support. Inspired to set up SEN Space from personal experience being a full-time carer to her two children with profound disabilities, founder and CEO Vikki Benton is passionate about providing quality care to children with additional needs.

Vikki undertook the **OCN Level 2 ‘Learning Disability: Positive Support in the Early Years’** course to further develop her knowledge and skills:



“There is a great lack of good training for staff. I completed a level three degree in early childhood, I’m a qualified early years teacher, and never really had specific additional needs training, hence why I took the course with Mencap. I also wanted my staff to see that the person who is managing this is always learning.”

Vikki found several areas of the training with Mencap NI particularly useful:

- “The organisation of the space was just brilliant, really breaking down the environment for a child.”
- “The emphasis on parents. There’s very little training which really looks at parents and how to work with parents. And I just loved from the course the importance of speaking to, understanding parents, and where parents are coming from, and the compassion.”
- “Instead of focusing on all the things that children can’t do, focus on some of the things the children can do, and that really came across in the training as well. It’s very positive.”
- “The sign posting was great. You know all these different links and things which you can then watch back again, or different videos. It equipped me with knowledge that I could then pass on.”
- “There was a real mix of people within early years settings, with a couple of parents too. I thought that was great because you were getting the feedback and the info from all these different perspectives.”

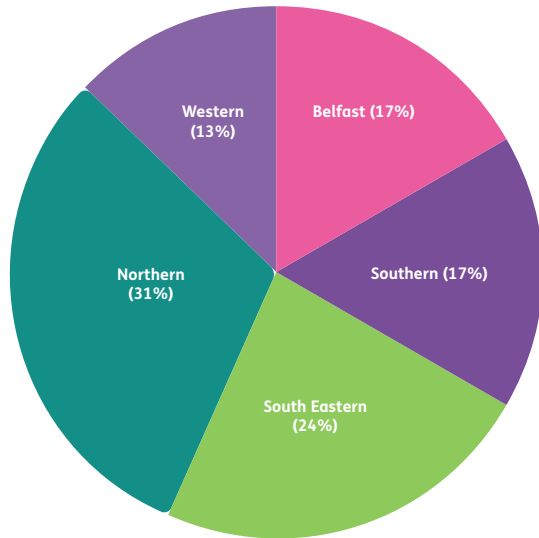
Vikki plans to undertake further training with Mencap NI, for herself and the wider staff team.

“Having staff who understand the needs of our children and families, ways to help them regulate and learn, will make a huge impact on these children. The more we understand them, the different ways they process and learn, the more they will grow and learn, and we will be able to provide a better quality of care and education that is suited specifically to their needs.”



Evaluation – Short Courses

Figure 4: % Participants by Health and Social Care Trust



102 participants across a range of short courses completed an online survey.

“This course has been brilliant for me. Very informative and useful. I think the only thing is that this course is only the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of the information around supporting children with learning difficulties in early years settings. I’ve just realised there is still a lot more that I need to learn around this area.” (Course participant)

Participants agreed:

94%

My understanding of how to support children with a learning disability has increased

97%

My understanding of how to support parents has increased

95%

I have a greater awareness of how to create an inclusive environment

95%

The course content was of a high quality

95%

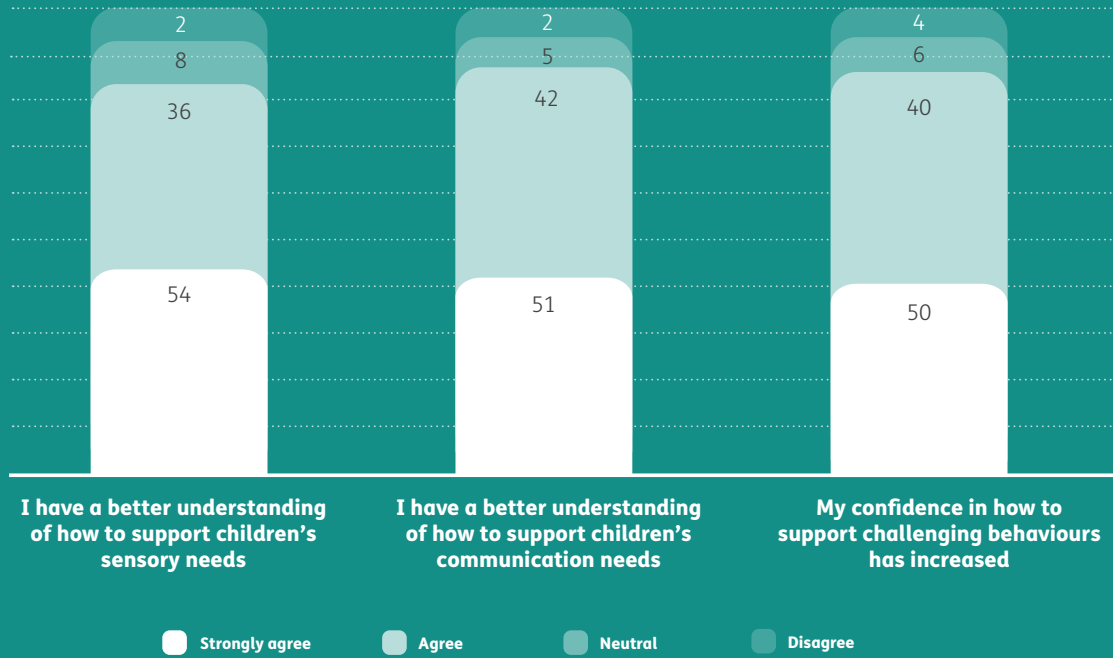
The course was well facilitated

90%

My team would benefit from more training in this area

As shown in Figure 5, in terms of specific areas of support, the majority of participants agreed they had a better understanding of how to support children’s sensory needs (90%); and communication needs (93%); and had more confidence in how to support challenging behaviours (90%).

Figure 5: % Participants' understanding of supporting children with a learning disability



Case Study 4 – An Droichead Daycare

Tara Gibney is a Manager in An Droichead Daycare, which provides a range of holistic support services to families of children attending the local Irish medium primary school. This includes nursery, after school sessions, and parenting support, and they currently work with 72 families and 107 children aged 0-12 years.

Staff had previously undertaken some basic disability awareness training, and Tara was keen to build on this by undertaking the **OCN Level 2 ‘Learning Disability: Positive Support in the Early Years’** course.



“We would have had very good practices with regards to additional needs, always trying to be inclusive, especially because we had second language learning here. We started to review our own practices, making sure we were still up to date with training. We are really trying to move forward and make a really good quality service.”

“There was a massive gap that we seen working with the parents of these families, the supports that they didn’t have access to. We want to give these children the best start, to give our staff the training, and to give the families the support they also need.”

Tara and one other member of the team initially undertook the OCN Level 2 course, and An Droichead Daycare is now working in partnership with Mencap NI to deliver further tailored training to 20 members of staff.

“Based on the training that we’ve done, we looked at where we feel our gaps are, what we’ve got, and what would benefit our staff to make sure we’re all working at the same level, having the same understanding. We want to do the Global Development Delay; this is definitely what our staff wouldn’t have heard of. We want to have the opportunity for them to see the actual setup of the services. So, we have arranged for it to happen in the Mencap building.”

“Ultimately, our vision is to be able to run a service specifically for children with additional needs so they can access our services, get that same support as well with the language. There’s a lack of that in the Irish language sector having that additional support. So hopefully down the years we may be able to run that out and support that across our sector as well.”

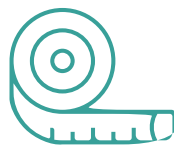


Mencap NI's Early Years Training Programme

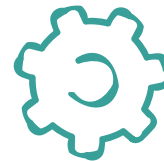
Key Features



Accredited and
non-accredited training



Tailored course content



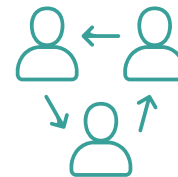
Practical strategies and
approaches



Highly skilled facilitators, with
lived experience



One-to-one assessment
support



Train the Trainer framework



In-person and online



Day and evening sessions

“For me really what brought it all together was that Judith was such a brilliant facilitator. She really is very relatable. She has her own personal experiences to bring to the table. And she shared that with us. And I thought that was just amazing and very brave of her as well, you know, to tell her story. And it makes it more real. And it has more of an impact.”

(Practitioner, Daycare)

Recommendations

1. Address high levels of unmet need by ensuring that children with a learning disability and their families have equitable access to the full range of early support services.
 - Implement change at a wider systemic level through increased investment, improved capacity, simplified assessment and diagnostic processes, better co-ordination of support, and mandatory learning disability awareness training for professionals.
 - Ensure that training for professionals incorporates engagement styles, and knowledge and understanding about the range of family needs, and available support services.
2. The curricula for professional early years qualifications should include key knowledge, skills and competence-based learning disability awareness training.
3. All professionals working in early years settings should be trained in learning disability awareness, and receive ongoing training as part of Continuous Professional Development. Training should specifically include areas such as:
 - Definitions and terminology
 - Creating an inclusive environment
 - Challenging behaviours / Positive Behaviour Support
 - Supporting well-being of children and parents
 - Practical strategies, and adapting for use at home
4. Young children with a learning disability and their families should be identified as a priority group in key policy areas relating to early years, childcare, family / parenting support, child poverty, and infant mental health.
5. The Early Learning and Childcare Strategy should be implemented with long term financial support and an associated action plan that ensures children with a learning disability have equitable access to high quality, inclusive childcare services, and receive specialist support to boost their development. This includes the provision of appropriate specialist equipment and staff trained in learning disability across the range of settings.



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