

Sparkle Evaluation

Executive Summary

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Sparkle[★]

Supporting Pre-school groups in Mid Kent



East Kent Hospitals University **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

NHS
West Kent



A multi-agency pre-school initiative

Transformative learning in early years' settings– an evaluation of Shepway SPARKLE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SPARKLE early years inclusion initiative was established in 2001. Based in Kent SPARKLE is currently available to early years' settings in three localities, Shepway, Ashford and Maidstone. This report provides a summary of the SPARKLE evaluation. Commissioned by the SPARKLE steering committee, the evaluation had two phases. Phase one involved the development of an evaluation framework and tools. The second phase focused on generating data about the processes and outcomes of the SPARKLE teams' work in the Shepway locality over four new terms. The evaluation process began in September 2006 and was completed in June 2008. Three early years settings (EYS) participated in the evaluation. Recommendations and implications for the future of the initiative have been developed following consultation with members of the team and steering committee. It is anticipated that this evaluation will contribute to decisions about how to further develop, enhance and extend the initiative.

Key recommendations:

- Set explicit goals of learning and reflection in early year settings and develop opportunities for EYPs to identify future learning needs at the conclusion of the SPARKLE intervention.
- Vary the amount of in-put from SPARKLE based on a more detailed assessment of need in the early years setting.
- Assess the motivation of EYPs and the readiness of the EYS to engage with the SPARKLE initiative.
- Apply the Inclusion Framework devised for the evaluation - this will enable teams to measure progress and outcomes, to reach their targets, observe change and know when these goals have been achieved.
- Establish clear beginning and end points to each of the separate stages of SPARKLE to bring focus and purpose to the work of the team.
- Teams to maintain an integrated approach to delivering SPARKLE by organising shared visits, developing joint goals and delivering joint training wherever possible.
- Develop quality printed and web based resources that promote SPARKLE and disseminate good practice across the County.
- Inform families about SPARKLE and develop strategies to involve hard to reach families.

Background

Current government policy highlights the importance of good quality childcare, education and early intervention for all children but especially for those from

disadvantaged backgrounds¹. Multi-agency and partnership working with young children and their families is a theme of all recent policy affecting children & families². That quality of provision is important to achieving positive outcomes for young children is acknowledged, challenges exist in how to develop the skilled workforce that will successfully deliver these aims³. Health professionals play an important role in sharing their knowledge and skills with EYPs and can contribute to a greater appreciation within early year's settings of typical child development and early intervention strategies that promote development. There are several examples of successful partnership working between health and education services particularly in relation to promoting communication and the development of language skills in early years⁴. Initiative such as Sure Start established speech & language therapists as key partners with education. Recent evaluations of these services have generated greater understanding about the benefits of these partnerships and the models of service delivery that work most effectively⁵. SPARKLE although based on similar principles can be distinguished from these initiatives in that the team share their knowledge & skills with EYPs adopting an educational rather than a direct or consultative (indirect) model of service delivery.

SPARKLE model

The multi-agency team includes: a speech & language therapist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist and specialist teacher advisor. Individual therapists are contracted by the local authority to provide 10 hours a week to the team and they work closely in each locality with a learning support assistant who is allocated 20-25 hours a week. SPARKLE provides a multidisciplinary and multiagency service to allow Pre-school settings to enable all children to access activities regardless of any difficulty the child may have.

Aims of SPARKLE

- To increase the confidence of EYPs in meeting the needs of a range of children including those with special needs.
- To increase EYPs knowledge and understanding of child development
- To assist in the early identification of children with special needs and to assist early year's settings to meet those needs in an inclusive environment.
- In response to individual needs identified by the early years setting to offer advice, resources and support that enhance play & learning opportunities provided by the setting.

¹ Sylva K, et al (2004) Effective Provision of Pre-school Education EPPE Project report. <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0001378.pdf>

² DfES Every Child Matters <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/earlyyears/>

³ Potter C (2007) Developments in UK early years policy and practice: can they improve outcomes for disadvantaged children? *International Journal of Early Years Education* 15 (2) 171-180.

⁴ DfES www.surestart.gov.uk

⁵ Barber M et al (2002) Evaluation of speech and language therapy projects supported by the standards fund 200-2001. London: DfES.

- To work closely with parents.

The team adopt a staged model in delivering their intervention over a period of four terms, approximately 8 months. (1) Initial Observation, (2) Identification of SPARKLE goals negotiated with early years setting (3) Intervention, (4) Review of goals and evaluation.

Rationale for the Evaluation

SPARKLE is recognised by those involved as providing an excellent level of support into early years. Since its inception in 2001 the team have gathered positive feedback from a range of EYS. These data includes personal testimonies, observations, questionnaires from practitioners and parents and statistical data which indicate that numbers of children requiring statements in the localities in which SPARKLE operates have declined. Letters received from EYS identify the benefits of the initiative and emphasise the importance of the educational aspects of SPARKLE to the developing the skills of the EYPs.

- The positive impact on practitioners' knowledge and understanding of child development.
- The uniqueness of the team approach in working alongside practitioners within the setting and offering a balance of role modelling and targeted training.
- The importance of specialist input into the early years settings.

Design

An external illuminative evaluation⁶ was commissioned by the Steering Committee in order to determine in more detail how the SPARKLE team bring about the positive change identified in the EYS and the extent to which SPARKLE meets its stated aims as an inclusion initiative. There were two distinct phases of the evaluation. Phase 1 focused on developing an Inclusion Framework for the evaluation and SMART observation and goal setting tools which would enable the Shepway team to measure change. In Phase 2 the Shepway SPARKLE team generated case study data from three participating early years' settings over a period of 4 terms. Interviews (n = 11) were also carried out in each of the settings at the conclusion of the intervention. Thematic analysis of the interviews and principles of qualitative case study analysis were applied to the case study data⁷.

⁶ Parlett M & Hamilton (1972) Evaluation as Illumination.

⁷ Loftland J & Loftland L (1995) Analysing social settings.

Key Findings & Recommendations

(1) Throughout the evaluation EYPs and the SPARKLE team were observed to be actively engaged in experiential learning⁸. The SPARKLE team worked alongside EYPS increasing their understanding of young children's development through demonstrating specific activities, providing written explanations for the choice and purpose of activity and modelling good practice in terms of how to further adapt and extend these activities to meet the needs of the children in the EYS. Targeted training was provided which focused on typical child development and explored how to promote young children's communication and interaction, motor development and play. This engagement in learning was not explicitly stated as a goal, or openly acknowledged by either the team or the EYP, the perception by the EYP that the team were there to provide new 'ideas' for activities lead to opportunities for EYPs to build on and reflect on their learning not being fully exploited.

Set explicit goals of learning and reflection in EYS and develop opportunities for EYPs to reflect on their learning and identify future learning needs at the conclusion of the intervention.

(2) The individual case studies identify how the team worked flexibly to meet individual targets in a range of settings. Each of the settings differed in terms of the populations they served, levels of motivation to engage with SPARKLE and existing understanding and skill of the EYPs. The impact of the intervention, measured by the depth and quality of learning that occurred varied in each setting but appeared greatest in the setting where motivation amongst the EYPs was high and level of social deprivation greatest. One setting where standards were already high demonstrated how 'good provision could be made even better', the team may have achieved this goal in a shorter time frame.

The team should consider varying the amount of in-put dependent on a more detailed assessment of need. Taster sessions could be used to establish levels of motivation and readiness to participate and shorter or longer interventions delivered dependent on the needs of the setting.

(3) Analysis of the case study data highlighted the importance of the preliminary phases of identifying the EYS and the early negotiations with the settings about what the purpose of the intervention was and the approach of the team. The motivation of individual EYPs and the readiness of the setting to engage in the intervention influence how effective the team are in a particular setting.

The initial questionnaire could be developed as a means of establishing the motivation of EYPs and the readiness of the nursery to engage with the SPARKLE team. It is important that all EYPs are told about the decision to

⁸ Kolb D (1984) Experiential learning. Experiential learning is when knowledge develops meaning when applied in a setting relevant to the learner.

invite the team in to the setting and that everyone understands the educational nature of the initiative.

(4) During Phase 1 of the evaluation the Shepway team developed and piloted a framework which operationalised the concept of Inclusion. The framework enabled the team to develop an observation tool and to devise from these observations a set of SMART⁹ inclusion goals for each of the settings they worked with over the period of the evaluation.

Establishing criteria for measuring progress and outcomes is essential for the team to reach their targets, observe change and most importantly know when these goals have been achieved. Teams should utilise the Framework of Inclusion and the observation and goal setting tools in each new setting.

(5) At the conclusion of phase 1 the team had clarified the exact purpose of each of the separate stages of the intervention. During piloting it was apparent that clear beginning and end points to each of the stages, with the addition of a formal meeting and negotiated goal setting stage assisted in bringing focus and purpose to the work of the team.

Clear beginning and end points to each of the separate stages of the initiative with the addition of a formal and negotiated [with the nursery] goal setting stage brings focus and purpose to the work of the team.

(6 & 7). The data from the case studies and interviews highlighted that the SPARKLE team work in parallel, this is possibly because they do not share a physical base and meet once a term. Some members of the team worked with all the children others identified small groups of children. Team members provided differing amounts of in-put. Parallel working was reinforced by the development of separate therapy goals, activity plans and individual training sessions.

There is scope for team to work in a more integrated fashion by organising shared visits and joint goals, delivering joint training and developing jointly advice and activity sheets. This will assist in presenting to the nurseries an integrated and inclusive intervention.

Advice sheets and leaflets shared with the early years settings are handwritten, photocopied and generally do not reflect the high quality of content. Funding should be sought to develop quality printed and web based resources that support the initiative and promote it to a wider audience.

⁹ Originally a management tool SMART goals are widely used as outcome measure in education and health services. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed.

SUMMARY

Caution needs to be exercised in generalising the outcomes of this small-scale qualitative evaluation of SPARKLE in the Shepway locality. It is difficult to generalise the findings to other localities, where SPARKLE teams have started to diversify since the start of the evaluation, and now differ with regard to the balance between targeted training and experiential learning opportunities offered. It is also difficult to apply the outcomes of this evaluation to other early years' initiatives. Bearing these limits in mind, it is intended that key findings will provide greater insight into how SPARKLE works and effective ways of facilitating learning & development in early years' settings.

The evaluation has provided greater understanding of how the SPARKLE team work flexibly with a wide range of early years settings adapting and modifying their interventions depending on need. It has provided evidence of how the team in some settings achieved transformational learning and generated depth, quality and variety in the learning experiences of the EYPs they came into contact with. The evaluation has highlighted aspects of service delivery that could be developed; these include the need to make explicit the educational aims of the intervention. The evaluation has highlighted how maintaining an integrated team approach in the delivery of the intervention is important. Finally it has highlighted where additional resources could help promote SPARKLE reflecting the high quality of its provision and ensuring that good practice in early year's settings is disseminated widely across the County.¹⁰

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¹⁰ Children's Executive Board Kent County Council (2006) Positive about our future Kent's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009.

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/89358E99-18B8-4591-AAE1-D0857107FCBA/0/childrenyoungpeoplesplan.pdf>

Framework of inclusion

