Kent Healthy Early Years Pilot Project – Practitioners’ and Parents’ Perspectives

This project was led by Dr Sacha Powell with Dr Sally Robinson and Dr Catherine Meehan (Department of Childhood Studies, Canterbury Christ Church University).

The Kent Healthy Early Years (KHEY) pilot was co-ordinated by Kent County Council (KCC) staff and was jointly funded by KCC, West Kent Primary Care Trust and Eastern and Coastal Kent Primary Care Trust.

The project involved 24 settings from 12 geographical areas across Kent. The KHEY pilot sought to raise awareness and knowledge of issues related to young children’s health and wellbeing and to positively impact on the health-related behaviours of local families. A secondary aim of the pilot was to improve links and partnerships between early years practitioners and other local services, and the families of children attending the settings.

The researchers undertook two rounds of structured enquiries involving practitioners and parents. Discussion groups and telephone interviews took place shortly after the official launch of the KHEY pilot (October 2009) and towards the end of the pilot project’s timeframe (February 2010). In total, 16 settings were represented by participants in the October research enquiries and 14 in the February enquiries. These represented 67% and 61% respectively of all the KHEY pilot settings at the time of the enquiries, which had dropped from 24 to 23 after the first few months.

Each of the KHEY pilot settings selected one of four themes around which they focused their activities. These themes were:

- healthy eating
- personal, social and emotional development
- physical activity
- emotional health and wellbeing.

All four themes and 11 of the 12 areas were represented by the settings that took part in the research.

Kent County Council asked the research team to find out about specific issues, which were grouped under the following headings:

- The Kent Healthy Early Years Pilot project - attitudes and understanding
- knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours relating to health and wellbeing
- relationships with external services, organisations and individuals
- partnerships with parents
- impact of the Kent Healthy Early Years Pilot project
- sustainability of the pilot project’s activities and effects.

It was found that practitioners were largely positive about their involvement in the KHEY pilot project and the support and guidance that they received from Kent County Council. Generally, parents and practitioners felt that it was a good idea for the local authority to ask early years settings to provide information about health and wellbeing issues and to raise awareness.