



## **Working with children and families**

### *Play groups and facilities*

#### **Pam**

Sybil, a play group leader, talks about her experiences in setting up and running a small rural play-group.

#### **Sybil Fielding**

Our first session was September '92, though it had taken us eighteen months to get it set up. With a lot of help and advice from social services, the under eights officer for our area, she was a real help and support through all that time, because it was the first play group that had been set up since the implementation of the Children Act. So we'd various rules and regulations to adhere to. She came down, she measured the size of the hall, told us how many children we could have, we then had environmental health officer came to inspect the hall, and we'd various things that the hall committee had to implement. The whole hall had to comply with safety standards and things before we could get going. And then it came to staffing and all the rest of it and it took us a good eighteen months to get the play group going. We're allowed to have fifteen children, they have to be two and a half years of age to be left, and we can have them up to five years.

It's basically keeping parents informed of what is happening so that we're all pulling together in the same direction. Because, quite often we get parents who will bring in things that are involved with the theme and we try and involve parents as much as is possible, and it benefits the children doing it that way. The families that we have children coming from very much reflects how in society that we have lots of working parents. It's not necessarily that we have mums bringing the children down to pre-school play group, quite often it's dad, or grand parents, and we have quite a lot of children that are brought by their child minders. Social services require the leader in charge to hold at least the diploma in play group practice, you've got to have that and they really stipulate that you should have had at least three years experience before you're actually running it. They like you to go beyond that, they like you to keep updated on various things. You've to do a child protection course, your, all staff are to hold first aid certificates, and keep abreast of everything that's developing. I don't think to start with parents perceive the amount of time, that goes into planning that isn't seen on a session. The fact that you have to plan and rotate, and make sure that you cover all curriculum areas although children are free to choose what play opportunities are out there, but at all times you're covering what age group you've got, and also that you're covering all aspects to develop, and stimulate all forms of play activity. Because that's how they're learning.

The other thing that we've worked very hard here is to... that we have quality equipment. We have and try and deliver the highest quality of activities that that you can do. We operate a 'milky bar' system, where the children can go for a drink, at any time. Milk, or if they're, quite a few of them are allergic to milk, they have juice. We try and deal with all dietary requirements that there are. We have had children with coeliac disorder, we had one child who was dairy intolerant, soya intolerant, and couldn't have eggs. Well, that vastly affects all that you can eat, and it wasn't just a case of being faddy, it was a case of, if that child consumed any of those things, she was going to be very ill. So we made it so that, everything was fine, and it meant researching and working with the parents, that we had the right things, so that that child could come and be just like everybody else.

#### **Pam**

Karen, a nursery teacher, describes the pattern of a morning or afternoon at nursery school and the sorts of things children can experience there.

## **Karen**

We do have quite a structure to the session, in that the children, when they first come through the door, they have their own coat peg and they have a picture on it which, they take the picture off and put it on a milk carton and hang their coat up, that picture is used if they put it onto some work that they've done, and they're wanting to take home. So they get used quite quickly to that. They choose the activity that they would like to do. Some children we find, always choose to come and be with an adult as mum's leaving, other children like to be doing something that they've perhaps got at home, so we've got things like Duplo which a lot of children already know, and various things that, the sand or the water which is quite therapeutic to play with is often a good one as well for them when they're first coming in.

But then we do have a set pattern. We have tidy up music which comes on at a later part of the session, and the children all know that that's the time to tidy up, we change it every half term, but they soon sort of respond to this music, and we all sit together in a carpeted area, and do a more formal sort of ten, fifteen minutes, then we have milk, then we usually so long as the weather's fine go outside, come in and do our big black book, as we call it, and then we have a story time. So, basically that pattern is followed, and we have, we've taken photographs of the children doing these things, so that, the children can see what part of they're, along the side of a filing cabinet, and the children can sort of see this is when they come in and there's a picture of them putting their peg on the milk, and then later on, this is them sitting in the big circle, and then after that, this will happen. And they respond quite well to these photographs and I think it helps them see how far down they are before mum's going to arrive, so that gives them that feeling of security and knowing what's going to happen next, and what else they have to get through if they're feeling upset.

We only take two new children in each session so that, if a child is upset, there is a knee for them to sit on, if they want to. I mean, some children don't want to be touched, you know occasionally you'll get a child who doesn't want that close contact, but most children of this age would appreciate, even if they're just standing close to you or sitting on the chair next to you, and because there's only two permanent members of staff that's why we keep it to two, so that there's always going to be somebody there if they need them, and they know that so they know that there's somebody, on a one to one basis if they still need that when they first start. We have quite definite planning now, most of it is planned over four terms, because the majority of children spend four terms in the nursery. So over those four terms, we will cover the whole of the alphabet, we will cover eight different mathematical topics if you like. Things like pattern and shape the, you know, those sorts of things. Number, I think is something that you do all the time, and we do a lot of singing games and things like that as well which bring in using number.

Other things are planned over a year. We always grow things every year we grow things and the children get a lot from their knowledge and understanding of the world for instance, out of planting potatoes which is what we're doing this year or growing marigolds which is what we did last year. We follow the whole sequence through over a period of a year. Music's done over a year as well, so that we do different types of music like, metal instruments one half term, and the children play them and we have, the tidy up music's a brass band. So it ties together, but we try to make ties that the children can respond to. My job as I see it is to find interesting ways of delivering what I'm being asked to deliver by the curriculum from the government, that fit the children that we've got, that fit the way they can learn, to devise the questions. So often the children learn because you ask them questions, and they have to think of an answer, and it's surprising how far they can think if you ask the right question and if you ask enough questions.

We also have students in, so we often have extra adults which is always a good thing because, conversation is so important for children of this age, and talking about what they're doing, will always enhance an activity that a child's doing. If they can talk to a peer that's fine, if they can talk to another adult that's better. And we also have quite a lot of parents who, help us on a regular basis, which is really good as well. I think we get a lot from that and the parents, I think, both enjoy it and also, learn things about their child in relation to other people's children from being in the nursery. But it sometimes helps us see things from a parent's point of view, because they're in the nursery working with us and they'll make little comments that we think, 'oh yes, hadn't thought of that!' So we learn from them as well.