



# Meeting the challenge of COVID-19

## Learning and practice



### **How one school in Dundee adapted its programme of support for children and their families**

#### **What was the challenge faced?**

The Addressing Neglect and Enhancing Wellbeing (ANEW) programme, delivered by CELCIS, aims to work alongside local authority areas to develop a consistent approach to practice to ensure that children and their families get the support they need at the earliest opportunity.

Since 2016, CELCIS has worked alongside Dundee City Council to build on and strengthen child and family participation. One example of this what is known as 'the buddy system'. Where there are concerns around a child and a family may be in need of additional support, the coordination of a multi-agency plan is required, and a 'Team Around the Child meeting' (TAtC) is arranged at the child's school. Parents and children also have the choice to attend and participate in the meeting, and are supported through a trained 'buddy', a designated adult who can help represent their views. If the parents and child choose not to attend, the buddy can still meet with them beforehand and then contribute to the meeting on their behalf. This ensures the views and needs of the child remain central to the meeting, and that the child's plan is developed and agreed to by everyone involved, including the parents and child.

Camperdown Primary School in Dundee chose to introduce this new practice and it is now part of the core methods of support offered to families. However, in the spring of 2020, the closure of many school buildings under the first COVID-19 lockdown meant that families, children, and agencies involved were no longer able to come into school for meetings. The school needed to devise new ways to ensure the agreed child plans could continue to be progressed, and families could still fully participate in meetings, and access the support needed.

#### **What change in practice took place?**

In place of face-to-face meetings, telephone conferencing was used to ensure the participation and engagement of children, parents, and the multi-agency partners involved.

The child's plan would be read out loud, discussed, and agreed to by everyone taking part in the call. If the parents and/or child chose not to attend the meeting, and the buddy attended and represented their views, immediately following the meeting the Buddy would talk through the plan with the parent and/or child to ensure their views were fully represented, and they were in agreement with the plan; though so far at Camperdown all parents involved have chosen to attend the meetings. A copy of the plan was emailed to everyone involved. The Chair of the meeting (usually the Head Teacher of the school), ensured everyone, particularly the child and their family, or their buddy, had an opportunity to share their views. At times, additional support was offered to families with this through existing relationships; for example a Health Visitor supported a mother at home to use the telephone conferencing system, enabling her to fully participate in the meeting.

During the course of the pandemic, the school also realised that many of the families most in need of support were new to the school staff working with them. As a result, additional measures were taken to build relationships with families and ensure the right support was provided to meet their needs at the earliest opportunity. For example, the family support worker within the school offered weekly one-to-one socially-distanced walks with parents. This supported the nurturing of existing relationships and the development of new ones.

### **Who was involved in making the change?**

Once the lockdown restrictions came into force, Camperdown's Head Teacher and the School and Family Development Worker came together to find new ways to engage with families to ensure meetings still take place. Consulting with staff members from across the school helped with the adjustment to this new way of working.

### **What difference did this change make?**

The various engagement activities offered have helped to build positive relationships between staff and families. For example, during the one-to-one walks, parents started to feel comfortable enough to open up about their feelings and share information about their home circumstances. This has helped staff to gain a better insight into the support they and their children could benefit from, and this can be built into their plan. Some parents and children have relayed that participating in meetings held over telephone conferencing has made them feel more confident about speaking and sharing their views. After the few years of holding face-to-face meetings, the preference from some families to engage in TAtC meetings using teleconferencing has meant that the team are now looking to offer this to families as an option to engage in future meetings, should this better meet their needs.

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Date March 2021

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