

## Finding out young children's views of the Crèche at Riverside

### BACKGROUND

Sure Start Armstrong aims to support all children under 4 and their families in the area, offering them the opportunities they need to develop their full potential and pass on advantage and choice to future generations. The programme is driven by the expressed needs of children and their parents in the area.

Listening to young children is an integral part of our work. We define listening in its widest sense communicating through all of the senses and not just the spoken word. We see the child as an expert in their own lives, a skilful communicator and a creator of meaning. We therefore, strive to gain the views of the child in the work of the programme, at the activity level as well as in wider decision-making processes.

Riverside crèche is based in the Sure Start Armstrong area. Staff wanted to find out what young children thought of the service as part of their ongoing evaluation process and to continually renew and refresh the opportunities for the children attending the crèche. The views of the children will be used to inform future planning of the service to ensure it is a service that children continue to want and need. The evaluation was also the beginning of a process to find the best ways of listening to young children on an ongoing basis within the crèche.

### METHODOLOGY

A range of children attend the crèche, they range in age, with some attending regularly and others on an ad-hoc basis. The right methods therefore, needed to be used to ensure that the youngest children could participate. The methods also had to be flexible enough so that children attending on a one-off basis could also be heard.

The focus of the evaluation was the lived experience of the children who attended the crèche. It was felt that a multi-method approach, such as the Mosaic Approach was needed.

Alison Clark and Peter Moss developed The Mosaic Approach as a tool for listening to young children. The aim of the Mosaic Approach was to find practical ways to contribute to the development of services that are responsive to the voice of the child and which recognise children's competencies. It is a multi-method approach; as a result it has been successful in work with children under 5.

The focus of the approach is also the lived experience of the children.

*"We emphasise the importance of exploring children's views and experiences of everyday life in the institutions they attend; as members of communities rather than*

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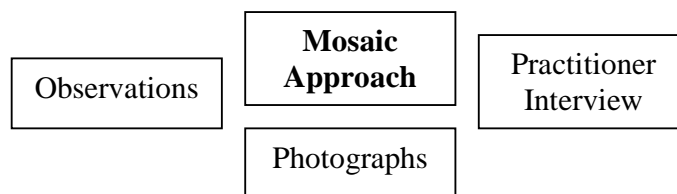
*consumers or users of a produce. Viewing children as consumers may lead to a shallow understanding of children's satisfaction rather than deepening our understanding of the complexities of their everyday lives"*

(Taken from Clark, A & Moss, P Listening to young children: The Mosaic Approach, NCB 2001).

## **Stage One – Gathering Information**

The multi-method approach is used to acknowledge that listening is a process not limited to the spoken word. The value of talking to children about their experiences has not been overlooked. However, tools are also used that enable the youngest of children and babies to participate including photography and observation. It is also an approach that brings together children's own views with those of family members and staff.

The pieces of the Mosaic that are used are chosen to ensure that a range of children can participate regardless of their age. The following pieces were to be used during the evaluation to construct a picture of the child's experience of the crèche.



## **Observation**

Observations were based around the question 'what is it like to be here?' and provided one way of making the youngest children's experience more visible. Time was spent observing what the children do whilst at sessions, which activity's they take part in, which toys they played with, where they spend their time and whom they spend their time with. Observations with children without speech are important 'listening' to body language, different facial expressions, noises and movement to build an impression of what being at the sessions are like. However, as this method is subject to interpretation it must be used in conjunction with other methods.

## **Photographs**

The disposable cameras appeal to the children and are a fun method to use. The cameras are used by the children to photograph their favourite things. Once developed the photographs are used as a discussion point and follow up with the children, to clarify what they had intended their photographs to be about. This would only be possible if children attended more than one session. Only one child was present at both sessions and used the cameras.

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## Practitioners Interview

Interviews with practitioners are also important to ensure that all staff are part of the process and to promote the importance of listening to children in our care. Practitioners know the child well and can offer great insight into the child's lived experience.

## Who Took Part?

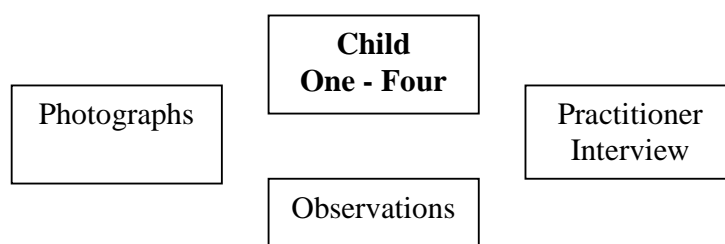
It wasn't possible to know in advance which children would attend each session. I attended two sessions during a quiet and busy period and worked with the children who were there. A small sample of children was taken so that time could be dedicated to develop an accurate picture of each child's experience. Four children took part they were aged between 10 months old and 3 years old, two boys and two girls. All of the children who took part will remain anonymous and will be referred to as child one to four throughout.

## Stage Two- Action Points

Once the information had been gathered the narratives and images are brought together to create a greater level of understanding about the child's experience. A matrix is created for each child to show what pieces of the mosaic reveal what information and which themes appear most frequently. This highlights the importance of using more than one method, as some views are more difficult to express than others. From each matrix action points are set in order to improve or sustain the child's experience. These points will form the basis of recommendations and future planning for the crèche at Riverside.

## FINDINGS

The following pieces of the mosaic were used to create a picture of each child's experience of the crèche at Riverside.



## Case Study One: Female aged 3

The following table shows which pieces of the mosaic revealed which information and which themes appeared most frequently.

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Child One	Observations	Practitioner
Engages well with staff	*	*
Likes looking at the books	*	
Likes the puzzles	*	*
Likes the home corner		*
Has had a conflict with another child		*
Would benefit from an outdoor area		*

### Action Points

The elements that worked for child one were

- Engagement with staff
- The puzzles
- The books
- The home corner

### Case Study Two: Male aged 2

The following table shows which pieces of the mosaic revealed which information and which themes appeared most frequently.

Child Two	Observations	Practitioner	Photographs
Likes to play in the sand	*	*	*
Likes to play in the house	*		*
Likes the freedom to move between activities	*		*
Likes to do his own thing	*	*	
Has had conflict with another child		*	
Has a strong bond with a member of staff		*	*

### Action Points

The elements that worked for child two were

- Engagement with staff
- The sand
- The house (with slide)

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- Freedom to move & choose

### Case Study Three: Male aged 10 months

The following table shows which pieces of the mosaic revealed which information and which themes appeared most frequently.

Child Three	Observations	Practitioner
Likes watching the other babies	*	*
Likes observing what else is going on	*	
Enjoys mornings		*
Is often tired in the afternoon		*
Engages well with staff		*

### Action Points

The elements that worked for child three were

- Engaging with the other children
- Engaging with staff
- Being able to observe what's going on around him
- More alert in the mornings

### Case Study Four: Female aged 2

The following table shows which pieces of the mosaic revealed which information and which themes appeared most frequently.

Child Four	Observations	Practitioner
Likes playing in the sand	*	
Likes drawing & colouring	*	*
Likes the slide	*	
Likes one to one contact with staff		*
Doesn't engage well when tired		*
Likes reading at the table		*

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## Action Points

The elements that worked for child four were

- Playing in the sand
- Movement (using the slide)
- Colouring & drawing
- Engaging with staff

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

All of the children enjoyed attending the crèche at Riverside. The one thing that worked for all of the children was their engagement with the crèche staff. It is worth reminding ourselves that social relationships are often the most important aspect of the child's experience. Although the size of the crèche is limited and staff wanted to get new ideas, what was most important from the children's point of view was the staff themselves.

The elements that worked for the children were:

- Playing with sand
- The house
- The home corner
- The slide & movement play
- Colouring & drawing
- Reading
- Puzzles
- Freedom to move & choose
- Social interaction with staff
- Social interaction with other children

All of these elements should be retained and built upon, following and developing what interests each child. Staff have already had some High Scope training and said they would like a refresher course in order to build on and sustain the work. This would ensure that children's views continued to be sought.

Other elements to consider:

Quiet time

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Some of the children found the crèche more difficult when tired. A quiet/sleeping space could be introduced. This is of course difficult given the limited space and the child's reaction to any such changes should be closely monitored.

Staff also said they felt the children would benefit from more outdoor play. The green open spaces could be utilised surrounding Riverside such as Hodgkin Park. Learning Through Landscapes has a vast array of ideas for provision without their own outdoor spaces.

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