Case study 11: Ethnic Minority Achievement

Establishing a partnership approach to improve Gypsy, Roma and Traveller engagement with early years
Introduction

This case study illustrates a commitment to improving alignment within the local authority (LA). This has improved engagement of pre-school Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) children and their families and supported year-on-year increases in their levels of achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Background

The LA serves a large county with over 180,000 children and young people aged from 0 to 19. In general, children and young people do as well in the LA as those in similar areas of England. Although young people do less well in GCSE examinations than young people in other places, exam results have improved at a significantly higher rate than nationally.

However, there are large inequalities across the LA, with some areas of high socio-economic deprivation. These are places where a high proportion of families are living in poverty, with family members less likely to be employed. There are poor families in places where most people are relatively well off.

5.4 per cent of children and young people aged 0 to 15 are from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds, which is lower than the average for the rest of the region or for England.

Approach

The Early Years and childcare service (EYCS) works closely with the Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) to ensure that the requirements of GRT communities are considered in the development of new services and the reorganisation of existing ones. Strategies specific to this joint work are embedded in the EYCS business plan in the following ways:

- funding for TESS outreach services;
- TESS representation at Early Years strategic planning groups;
- commitment to training across the Early Years sector jointly delivered with TESS, for example professional development training was focused on ‘Embedding cultural perspectives in the EYFS’ for 600 practitioners in maintained settings;
- resource development and training;
- fidelity to the guidance developed by the National Strategies’ Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement Programme.

Training at children’s centres and joint site visits by TESS and children’s centre personnel, and input by the TESS to children’s centre delivery plans through management groups and the Enjoying and Achieving focus groups, have ensured the mainstreaming of the work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

A rolling programme of training on best practice for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and their families is delivered by TESS as part of the LA’s professional development programme for Early Years practitioners across all sectors.

All EYFS maintained and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings now have culturally reflective resources and examples of planning for the inclusion of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures. Evaluations from the network training events reflected practitioners’ willingness and intention to reflect Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture in their practice as part of their Quality First inclusive teaching.
The EYCS also funded the production of a culturally specific picture book, *Come and Count with us!* TESS developed the resource with members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, gaining national recognition as finalists for the 2007 Sure Start Partners in Excellence Awards. A copy of the book was sent to every maintained and PVI setting across the authority and was included in the Bookstart Plus gift bag.

Positive cultural images within the book and an interactive CD-ROM have helped to counter stereotypical and negative views picked up through the media and to promote a more accurate and informed understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture within the workforce.

**Outcome**

- There has been a year-on-year increase in the number of pupils accessing pre-school education and other play and learning opportunities since 2000, when only 16 children accessed their free entitlement. Between 2005 and 2008 the average number of children accessing a Foundation Stage place has been 98 per year.

- There has been a year-on-year increase in attainment at the end of the Foundation Stage. (See graphs below.)
A Traveller father has become the vice-chair of a pre-school committee.

Members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community attend parents’ focus groups and a Traveller mother has become a parent representative at a children’s centre and is now joining the management board.

As a result of early intervention outreach work, and greater alignment across services and partnerships, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents are increasingly involved in a range of early learning opportunities and adult training, for example ‘Stay and Play’, ‘Fun Fit Families’, ‘Terrific Twos’, Paediatric First Aid, and baking sessions with the nutritionist.

Parents from these communities are feeling increasingly that services value and respect their culture, and consequently they have a growing confidence that they will be welcomed and accepted.