

EY OAG Action Research Project Story of Implementation - Muna (Childminder)

Context: I am a childminder for six children, three of whom have additional needs. Through the Early Years OAG Action Research Project, I focused on supporting a non-verbal child to develop greater independence and communication. The child joined the setting with emerging needs. The child's parents were doing much of the communication and decision-making for him.

The Focus: The project focused around a simple but important question: "What can I do to make this child as independent as possible... how can he access things? ... how can he tell me what he needs because he's not verbal?"
The focus became improving accessibility and communication to enable the child to express his needs independently.

What changed in practice:

Following initial project discussions, I reflected on the environment and approach:

After that 1st meeting... I went back to check my setting and I said to myself, okay, 'what can I try?'

I tested a range of communication approaches. While visual supports such as pictures and photos were not effective for this child, I adapted the approach based on his interests.

Then I found a communication device online. You press a button and it says the sentence for you... I'm hungry, I'm sad... I want my mommy." I modelled meaning and built his understanding.

Every time he pressed, I'm hungry, I pointed to the food... every time he pressed like toilet, I showed him the nappy, I showed him the toilet.

This consistent linking of communication to action supported the child to understand and use the device meaningfully.

Working in partnership with parents:

A key part of the project was building parental confidence. It helped his parents have the confidence that I know how to encourage their child to become more independent.

I shared the strategies with his parents, saying 'What's working' with me and how can try it at home as well. This resulted in a joined-up approach across home and in a setting. His current nursery are using it now too... it's become like a home nursery, child thing that we all use and he takes it everywhere. The child's parent said "my child is making progress!"

Impact on the child:

The impact on the child has been significant since September.

- Increased independence in routines
- Improved ability to communicate needs
- Greater confidence and engagement

He's confident enough that he knows it's breakfast time so he'll say I'm hungry... he'll point to his toast... then he'll sit at the table.

Routine wise, he's become more confident... he can't say it, but he's expressing himself.

The child's sense of belonging has also strengthened. He comes in with confidence now. He will knock on my front door, comes through my house like he's part of the household. There are also early signs of speech development. He's saying little words... where he's repeating words, which is a good sign.

Impact on me, the parents and other professionals:

It surprised the parents that it worked. The family are surprised and happy and it gives them confidence that their child is now even more independent.

The approach has also influenced practice beyond the setting, with other professionals adopting the strategy. For me, the more confident I am, the more I'm able to express myself in front of the parents and then we can work together.

Anybody can do this. You just have to have the confidence to put into that child and find a way to communicate.