

Setting: Todholm Early Learning and Childcare Class, Renfrewshire

Type: Training for staff and equipment for the service

Todholm is an early learning and childcare class located in Paisley. It offers places to children aged three to five and currently has 55 children in its care. In August 2021, Todholm fully implemented 1140 hours, with children attending from 9am to 3pm, Monday – Friday. The service has been successful in securing awards from the ELC Inclusion Fund in four of the six rounds so far.

The challenge

Todholm has worked hard to create a stimulating learning environment where children are active participants in their learning. To do this, they continually invest in their staff to have the right skills in supporting child development and good knowledge of resources to enable high quality learning experiences.

An identified need was training for staff in the Makaton language programme. Makaton uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate. Within nursery settings, it supports the development of essential communication skills such as attention and listening, comprehension, memory, recall and organisation of language and expression. Using signs can help children who have no speech or whose speech is unclear or developing. Using symbols can help children who have limited speech and those who cannot, or prefer not to sign.

In addition, Todholm wanted to secure new equipment for outdoor play in their large garden space to help create a more inclusive environment for their children with additional support needs.



A crawl-through tunnel has helped boost creativity and adventure

Actions and approach

With the help of the ELC Inclusion Fund, Todholm invested in Makaton training for three more of their staff, adding to the number already trained in using the language programme. This was invaluable in helping to support two of their children, who are non-verbal, to communicate with staff and their peers. A 'Makaton sign of the month' was introduced and the children learn Makaton songs which help to promote an inclusive setting.

To develop the outdoor play area, Todholm was able to buy water play equipment that helped to support their ASN children who enjoy sensory play. Creating an environment where they can explore, experience messy play and play alongside their peers, the pipes and tubes allow them to build and be creative.

The purchase of a crawl-through tunnel provided development for a child who needed support with gross motor skills. Working with his physiotherapist, the staff were able to support him to do a variety of activities and the tunnel was a great help in allowing him to crawl and move about freely without support. This developed his ability to play independently and his sense of adventure and creativity.

To support a child who was struggling to settle into the nursery, and who had expressed an interest in bugs and the outdoors, Todholm used the inclusion fund to buy a bug hotel, bug catchers, magnifying glasses and a grow and exploration box.



Impact and evaluation

The benefits of increased use of the Makaton language programme have been widely felt across the setting. Staff are reporting that it's helped all the children as they have visual signs to follow if they have difficulty processing information.

The equipment purchased to support inclusive outdoor play has also been a great success. The child who was struggling to settle at the nursery has enjoyed exploring the outdoors area with the new bug detectives equipment, and it has provided the means to connect him with his peers as the children come together to explore the garden.

The addition of a large mirror to the garden space allows the children to explore their reflections and supports body awareness. Use of the mirror to stimulate conversation and discussion has also helped staff to develop the children's language skills. A recent new start who has English as an Additional Language has been supported with the mirror to explore naming of parts of the body.

A new playground sensory set can be hung from trees and the fence. The windchimes blow in the wind, creating a lovely soothing sound which helps to calm anxious children. Staff have reported that this has been very useful in the current climate where Covid-19 restrictions mean that a parent and child's first visit is to the garden, so this helps to alleviate any initial anxiety.

Headteacher of Todholm Primary School and Early Learning & Childcare Class Aileen Cochrane says: "Through the use of these new resources, we've really raised awareness of the importance of an inclusive environment. The purchase of these resources provides a catalyst that inspires and motivates staff to seek out new ways to ensure we are more inclusive."



Outdoor play is central to the children's experience at Todholm

Lessons learned

Aileen says that by taking note of the children's interests, their views and opinions, "Todholm can ensure our environment is a safe, stimulating learning space where all our children thrive and their needs are supported."



Next steps

Delighted with what they've been able to achieve with the support of the ELC Inclusion Fund, future plans are to seek out new ways they can go further to develop the learning for children and support staff with the right training to respond to children's individual needs.

