

Reflections on the mentoring process from services involved in the Siolta QAP

Little and Big Rascals Dunleer.

Mentoring was a very important element to our services. The mentor guided us through the Siolta programme at a pace that was workable for our service. Over time a strong partnership grew between the mentor and the service, this allowed for everyone's opinion and valued experiences to be shared. This resulted in a successful outcome for everyone involved.

The experience of being a mentee initially brought some personal challenges. I had to adapt to some major changes to the way I was used to operating my service. However, once I started to accept that change brought benefits, I became more open to the ideas from the mentor and the staff. Personally I felt that the mentoring process opened my mind to try out new arrangements and to seek further knowledge on all areas of my work.

I felt the main benefits of the mentoring process was it gave me a greater confidence in how I carried out my work. It helped me to become a stronger leader as I now have a better knowledge and understanding of all the issues that arise during the course of being manager of an early years setting. The mentoring process also helped all members of staff with clarification of the work that they carry out each day. Having the mentor visits kept us all on a positive path of growth, as the mentor always recognised and showed appreciation of the work being carried out.

The mentoring relationship worked for our service as it was not a one-way process. Over time we developed a strong relationship with our mentor, this relationship included honesty, support and confidentiality. There was also a good deal of humour and practicality during the mentoring visits, time was valued and not wasted. Respect was always shown, and those involved felt valued which encouraged us all to carry on and complete the Siolta process, which at times could be very daunting.

I feel that the mentoring process is a vital component to retain and improve the quality of the early year's sector. The sector has become extremely regularised, however there has being no formal input from any agency on how best services can deal with new regulations. If each service where to have at least two mentoring visits per year, this would encourage continued work towards quality. This would help

services meet with all the regulations which in turn would provide children with the proper care and education that they deserve.

Fingers and Toes Latton

Mentoring is a combination of a learning experience, partnership, education, enlightenment and the eye of someone neutral to shake up and question practices, create awareness, and provide solutions for best practice. The mentor is a guiding angel, especially in large services where it's hard to get a staff together, and I suppose small services can experience stagnation.

You need to be able to accept suggestions, criticism as an opportunity to improve, you need to form a relationship with the mentor, be willing to implement reflect be aware of value of service, have dedication and co-operation of all staff and parents.

For our service the benefits have been multiple as it provides neutral, non-judgemental observations, interacting with floor staff. It is learning in an open space, doing, it is receiving instructions for personal and professional growth. It is highlighting quality performance, it is objective and it is guidance. Management and staff need to be willing, open minded, have trust and be able to ask questions, and discuss topics.

Mentoring should be ongoing, at least twice yearly, and if possible join other agencies for example Better Start or any other service. This would prevent stagnation, assist to keep service up to date with new concepts, and prevent isolation of staff and service, the mentor would act as a buddy to keep quality to the forefront at all times.

Le Cheile Community Childcare Simonstown, Navan.

Le Chéile Community Childcare have been involved in the mentoring process with the NCN for the last few years and have found the partnership incredibly positive. The introduction of the Siolta Framework encouraged all Early Years professionals to reflect on their current practices with the aim of providing a quality service to the children and families in our care. The advice we received from our Siolta mentor has been invaluable to our staff in both portfolio building and day to day practice.

On signing up to be involved in the Siolta QAP it is very important that it is a shared vision with all staff and there definitely has to be a united willingness to commit to the programme. The portfolio building is a huge body of work and therefore needs a great deal of teamwork in order to achieve completion. We feel very lucky to have our mentor to give guidance and support and the routine visits are very useful for this reason. If a times we struggled to achieve our set goals, our mentor was extremely understanding and helped to set new goals that were achievable. The mentor experience for us was an invaluable support and we look forward to our visits to make sure we are following the right path and also for recognition of the achievements we have made.

We believe there are huge benefits to ongoing mentoring in the Early Years Sector, it is so important to stay connected with new developments in the sector and the mentoring process offers that connection. Additionally, from our experience with our mentor the guidance has been delivered very sensitively so at no point have we felt our practice was inadequate. As with the importance of continuous professional development in the Early Years Sector we prefer to conform to a shared vision that 'there is always room for improvement'. The mentoring process encouraged us to reflect on the experiences we provide and ensure that we offer a child-led curriculum with meaningful experiences for the children in our care.