

**Building confidence,
consistency and
communication in an
early years setting**



Setting: Early years setting in a rural area

Role interviewed: SENCo and early years practitioner

Programme: Early Years Development Programme (EYDP)

The starting point

When a young child with Down syndrome joined the setting, the team had limited prior experience of supporting children with this learning profile. As a rural setting, opportunities to connect with other professionals working with children with Down syndrome were also limited.

The setting wanted training that was practical, reliable and specific to Down syndrome – something that would support not just one practitioner, but the whole team. The recommendation to explore Down Syndrome UK came directly from the child's parent.

Why DSUK's EYDP?

Before choosing EYDP, the setting explored a range of training options. What stood out was that EYDP offered a holistic, Down syndrome-specific approach that covered communication, behaviour and learning – all in one place.

The team valued knowing the programme was informed by lived experience and evidence-based practice, and that it came recommended by a parent they trusted. We'd looked at lots of different training opportunities, but we found that DSUK's EYDP was quite holistic and covered a lot of different sections.



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Putting EYDP into practice

The team engaged with the EYDP video training and attended drop-in support sessions. The drop-in sessions are hosted by experiences, specialist advisors and practitioners space to discuss real challenges and problem-solve together with other professionals supporting children with Down syndrome. Several EYDP resources were quickly embedded into daily practice.

Supporting communication and language

One of the most impactful resources was the personal book from the speech, language and communication section. Practitioners worked closely with the family to identify meaningful words and routines. Parents provided photographs of family members and everyday situations, which were used to create a personalised book.

This approach led to noticeable changes. The child became more animated when engaging with the book and began vocalising words – something the team had not seen before. Practitioners reflected that this was an activity they would not have thought to create without EYDP.



The child really enjoys looking through it and has started to become more animated and vocalise some of the words.



Positive behaviour support

Through EYDP drop-in sessions, the team explored behaviour strategies linked to understanding why behaviours occur. One challenge involved running off behaviour, which had previously escalated when adults engaged in pursuit. By calmly applying strategies discussed during EYDP support sessions, the team saw a reduction in this behaviour and felt more confident responding in a way that did not reinforce it.



Learning about the behaviour strategies has been really helpful. We had a child who enjoyed running out of the room, and through the drop-in sessions we learnt how to respond calmly, not turn it into a game, and bring them back in without reinforcing the behaviour. They do it a lot less now, and we feel much more confident supporting them.

Early literacy and numeracy

EYDP resources supported progress in early literacy and numeracy. Shape matching activities were extended through modelling and supported drawing, helping the child develop both understanding and vocabulary.

Sound cards from the speech section were used regularly. Over time, the child – who had been non-verbal when they joined the setting – began to vocalise sounds, which staff described as “amazing to hear”.



Impact on the whole team

The EYDP was not used by just one practitioner. All one-to-one staff, alongside the SENCo, were trained using the programme. This meant everyone was working consistently, with shared understanding and shared strategies.

Learning about the Down syndrome profile helped staff slow down, reassess expectations and pitch learning at the right level. Practitioners reported feeling more confident, more informed and better equipped to support the child meaningfully.

Ongoing support and connection

For a rural setting, the opportunity to attend EYDP drop-in sessions was particularly valuable. These sessions offered a rare chance to connect with other professionals working with children with Down syndrome and to share real-life experiences and solutions. Staff described these sessions as collaborative, supportive and practical.



The drop-in sessions have been really helpful. It's almost like a solution circle where you can talk through real concerns and next steps.

Would they recommend EYDP?

Yes. The practitioner shared that EYDP has supported the entire team to grow in confidence and understanding. The combination of training, resources and ongoing support meant staff could put learning into practice straight away. They described EYDP as “a whole package” that is both useful and practical – and encouraged other settings to take up the opportunity if it is available to them.



We're all on the same page, and it's made everyone feel more confident in supporting the child.



If you get the opportunity to use the programme, then definitely do it. It's helped all of our practitioners learn so much more, put strategies into practice, and have the resources ready to use. The whole package is very useful.

If you would like to discover more about our Early Years Development Programme, please contact:

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