

Investing in Children Membership Award™ Evaluation

Carr's Child and Family Services (TUSLA)



Introduction

For the purpose of this evaluation for the Investing in Children Membership Award™, I met with Sophie, Mia, Millie, Catalin, Aysar, Kayla, Marley, Yousef, Roxy, Evanah and Jason.

Carr's Child and Family Services was established in 1887 and is situated in Dublin. It provides services to children and their families in partnership with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

Central to their practice is the focus on support and strengthening of family relationships. Carr's achieve this by meeting the needs of the families' young children in order to obtain the best possible outcome children and families. The ethos of Carr's is based on the belief that, when families need support, they should receive not only quality professional care, but also empathy and empowerment that places children and families at the centre of decision making.

The service consists of nineteen members of staff that include Early Education Workers, Family Support Workers, Play Therapists and Cooks. The building in which they operate is designed to support babies and mothers, offering accommodation and support to women aged from 18 years old, who are pregnant and/or have young children under the age of two. There is also a purpose built crèche that offers early intervention and support to families.

For the purpose of this re-evaluation I visited Carr's crèche. It was evident from my visit that staff put the children at the heart of everything they do and involve them in all decisions affecting them. My evaluation was during free play time where I observed the children painting, playing outside, and partaking in sand and water play. The children very much drove their own learning and were even able to re-fill their own paint and water containers.

This report will highlight the new ways in which the staff involve children and parents in decision making and identify any changes that have taken place.

Opportunities for Dialogue and Change

Mud Kitchen

The children asked the staff for a place where they could 'cook' outside in the garden. As a result the staff and children had a meeting to discuss what they would like in the mud kitchen, which was named by the children. The children said they would like a sink, pots, pans, a cooker and presses. Anthony and Philip from

Maintenance were brought on board and built a mud kitchen in the garden with everything the children had asked for. Parents also contributed to the project by bringing in old utensils and cutlery.

“We bake.”

“We have fun.”

“We pretend to cook.”

“There are pots and pans and sinks.”

“It’s called the muddy kitchen because it has mud.”

“It’s a new kitchen.”

“It was my idea to get new things for the mud kitchen and then someone did it.”

“I like jumping in muddy puddles.”

“I splash Catalin with the mud.”

See below pictures of the mud kitchen with all the utensils:



Sensory Corner

The children also asked for an area where they could go for some quiet time if the room got too noisy. The staff went to ‘Recreate’, an educational supplier, and brought back recyclable materials from which the children made lots of items for their sensory area including old sequin cushion covers, old CDs, floor mats and hanging dream catchers. The children explained the sensory corner to me:

“Cool things are there.” “That’s our special place.”

“[My favourite] is squishy things.”

There is also a tent where the children can ***“have a nap and relax”***.

See below picture of the sensory corner:



Feelings corner

In another area of the room, there is a feelings corner where children can go and pick up a book or point to a picture of what emotion they are feeling. They also created different faces on wooden spoons showing the different emotions. This allows even non-verbal children to communicate how they are feeling to staff.

See below pictures of the feelings corner:



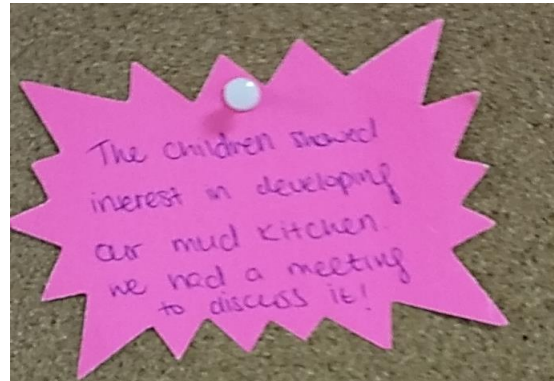
When asked what emotions there are, one child told me: ***“Happy, sad, angry, worried.”***

When asked what their favourite emotion was, they replied ***“Happy.”***

Interest Board

The staff in Carr’s have created an interest board where they record the interests of the children and what they would like to do. The learning is then directed from these suggestions. When I asked the children what was on the board they said ***“loads of things.”***

See pictures below of the interest board and the mud kitchen suggestion:



One of the children had a big interest in dinosaurs so the staff organised a visit to Dinosaurs World in the zoo. The children described the trip to me:

"All the crèche come too."

"We saw loads of animals."

"The dinosaurs were very big."

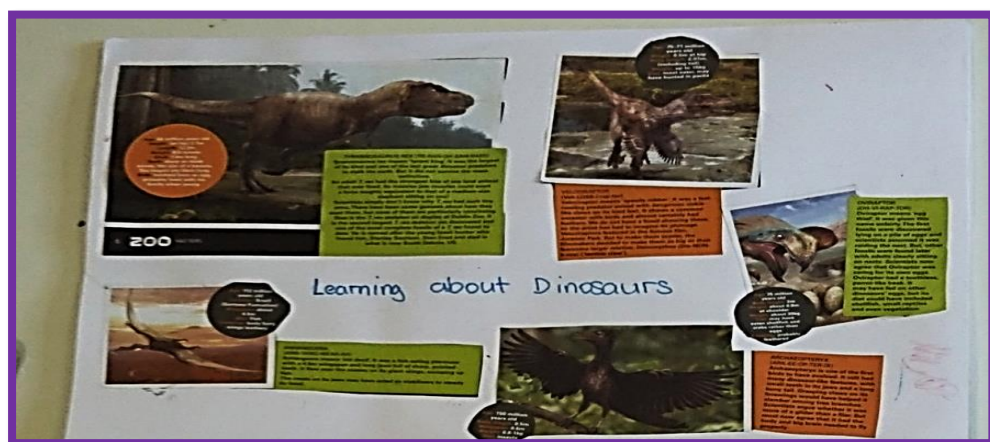
"We saw a baby dinosaur, it wasn't so much bigger than people."

"It was a bit scary."

"I prefer small dinosaurs."

"That is a T-Rex."

See picture below of the dinosaur project:



Menu planning

The children in Carr's have always been involved in choosing their food by pointing to pictures of their preferred meal. This project has evolved further so now there is a menu book full of all meals and treats available and parents are now invited to the weekly menu planning discussion. The choices for the week are then written up on the parents' notice board and this allows parents to cook the meals at home. One parent I met explained how it was great to know what food her daughter was eating and to be involved in the process, saying the **"Crèche is great like that."**

The children were eager to tell me their favourite meals were **"chicken curry"**, **"pesto pasta"**, **"egg sandwiches"** and **"spaghetti Bolognese."**

The children also told me about meal times:

"That is our table where we eat, Breifni is sick so Cathy is the cooker today."

"We're having chicken curry."

"It was my idea to have spaghetti Bolognese, it is my favourite, my mammy makes it at home."

"After dinner we get a pudding."

"I like chocolate pudding, I eat a lot of this."

"Tina made pancakes and ice-cream."

See below pictures of the menu planning book so even non-verbal children can express their preferences:



Curriculum Progress

Each child has a folder with photos and descriptions of the work they are doing in class. The children have access to these folders and can at any time go through them with their parents and show them what they have done. There is a space for the parent to sign to show they have been updated by their child.

One child described the process to me:

“I show my mammy my folder.”

See below picture of the children’s folders:



Universal Children’s Day

Carr’s celebrated Universal Children’s Day by asking the children ***“What is your favourite thing about being a child?”*** and they wrote their answers on the board with the help of staff. Early Childhood Ireland came on the day to present the children with their award for winning the ‘*Learning Stories*’ initiative with their dinosaur project.

See below picture of Universal Children’s Day:



Conclusion

It was clear from meeting with the children that they not only benefit from attending Carr's crèche but they also enjoy their involvement in the day-to-day decision making. The children were fully participating in the crèche by choosing the activities they like to do and directing their learning. When asked do they like when the staff listen to their ideas, the answer was **"YES!"**

Based on feedback gathered on the interest board about an outdoor kitchen and dinosaurs, the staff helped the children create the mud kitchen in the garden and organised a visit to dinosaur world. The children with whom I met with were able to identify these changes

For these reasons, I would like to recommend that Carr's Child and Family Services receives the *Investing in Children Membership Award*[™] for the second time and I look forward to seeing further developments made by the children and staff when a re-evaluation of the project is done in the near future.

The children listed below have endorsed this report and recommend that Carr's Child and Family Services receive the *Investing in Children Membership Award*[™]. They were attending the crèche when the report was written.

I would like to finish by saying **"Thank you and well done"** to all the children and staff for their support and contributions to this evaluation for the *Investing in Children Membership Award*[™].

Congratulations.

This report has been approved by Sophie, Mia, Millie, Catalin, Aysar, Kayla, Marley, Yousef, Roxy, Evanah and Jason.

Avril Dooley

Participation and Partnership Officer

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency

On Behalf of Investing in Children CIC UK

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