

Supporting Children with SEND in Solihull The Natural Childcare Company : Milly

Good practice example: Providing access and inclusion in the early years

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The setting: The Natural Childcare Company (NCC) is privately owned childcare provision, which has been registered since 2014. The nursery has 94 places and offers full day care and sessional day care for children aged 3 months to 5 years. There are 32 staff who are well qualified and experienced and as identified by Ofsted in 2016 are “incredibly knowledgeable about how to promote the learning of young children”. The nursery is welcoming and provides a sense of belonging and security for both children and their parents. The nurseries universal high quality practice provides a strong foundation for their approach to inclusive practice.

The nursery offers the 30 hours free entitlement to eligible parents. This good practice example looks at the effective and successful inclusion of Milly. Milly has attended the Natural Childcare Company (NCC) since December 2014. She has attended on a full time bases and during her time, she has moved from Babies into Preschool. Her early years education has been spent at NCC who have provided an inclusive education for her.

The child: Milly is described by the setting Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) as curious, determined, happy, expressive, gentle, sensitive and laughs a lot. Her parents describe Milly as cheeky and can be a diva too!

Milly has cerebral palsy; with damage to her brain. She has hypotonia; this means that she has low muscle tone in her body. She is non-verbal. She is in nappies and requires support for physical handling to move from room to room, as she is unable to crawl or walk. She does tire easily from physical exercise or mental stimulation and so requires sleep to gather her strength to continue.

What is important to Milly?

Milly enjoys exploring sensory toys, especially toys which are visually attractive and glittery. She likes to investigate things using touch. Milly also likes to watch what is happening around her. Milly’s favourite activity at the moment is the ‘slinky’. Over the time Milly has attended the nursery, she has gradually developed trusted relationships with a few key adults who she sees on a regular basis and who know her well. Understanding Milly’s preference for familiar trusted adults has been a key to planning and offering a wider range of opportunities for Milly’s learning and development.

What is important for Milly?

It is important for Milly to be included in the whole of the nursery activities and to be enabled to take part in opportunities, through individualised planning. IT is important that her strengths and areas where she needs specific support are met with sensitivity and commitment. It is important that the specialist support available for Milly’s development, such as physiotherapy and speech and language therapy is incorporated into the day-to-day activities of the nursery. It is important for Milly to be supported and encouraged by people who she trusts and who understand her. Milly is able to communicate how she is feeling using many communication skills such as facial expression, vocalisations and body movements. It is important for Milly that she is “listened” to and responded to, acknowledging her responses to any given situation.

What is important to Milly’s parents?

- That they were able to meet with the setting SENCo before Milly started to share information and gain shared expectations about Milly’s inclusion and development and that activities were discussed with the parents.
- That the SENCo demonstrated confidence and experience and was able to explain the nursery practice regarding SEND children, what they would offer, how inclusion would work and the methods of preliminary support offered to a SEND child prior to their arrival and then the next steps after transition period.
- That there was regular communication between the setting and parents using a “communication book”.
- That time would be made available to focus on the key priorities of development for Milly.
- That the key person and SENCo had the opportunity to attend multi agency meetings.
- That the key person and SENCo could work collaboratively with outside professionals.

Planning and preparation

Milly’s parents chose the Natural Childcare Company, who welcomed her and from the beginning worked closely with the setting staff team, including the SENCo, to ensure that as much information about how the setting could support Milly was shared before Milly’s transition from home to the nursery. The setting has a flexible settling in policy and this enabled Milly and her parents to respond to how Milly responded as she settled in. Milly’s key

person worked closely in order for this transition to be successful and the setting SENCo was also very closely involved. During this period, there was liaison with other professionals already working with Milly and her family. The Solihull Inclusion Service were also invited to the setting to offer support and advice. The parents and professionals involved worked together to request an education, health and care needs assessment, which resulted in the local authority issuing an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

Whole setting Universal practice

The whole setting practice established as part of high quality practice was recognised by Ofsted to contribute to outstanding outcomes for children, 'Children make outstanding progress from their starting points. This includes children who benefit from funded education and disabled children and those with special educational needs.' The observation, assessment and planning cycle used includes using E-Log tracking to help identify the strengths and gaps to inform the action plan learning goals and targets. This is also informed by the views of the parents and the advice and guidance from visiting outside professionals.

The practitioners at the setting were already familiar with the use of visual support for young children's learning and also in using Makaton. These approaches added to the way in which Milly was supported in the nursery.

Adjustments to whole setting practice

As the practitioners learnt more about Milly, they were able to make adjustments to day-to-day practices to promote Milly's involvement. The practitioners observed that Milly demonstrated clear preferences for members of staff who were particularly sensitive and calm and who provided Milly with opportunities to gradually get used to changes and new experiences. Milly started to use touch to indicate her readiness for interaction. This was an important aspect of development that the practitioners then looked out for to start developing interactions with Milly.

Targeted support

Milly's preferred learning environment is quiet, calm, predictable with few distractions and specifically this was noticed when Milly is trying things for the first time. Therefore the approach taken was to provide a small stepped and gradual introduction to new experiences in a smaller environment with close adult encouragement and support and then to gradually extend this into new environments and use a wider range of materials and equipment. This approach was based upon the small steps Portage Model which the SENCo is familiar with and explained to other practitioners.

Specialist support

Milly uses a specific chair so that she can be involved in focused activities throughout the day, the chair is also used at meal times, when she is fed by a familiar and trusted adult. Milly has a walking frame and opportunities to use this to develop her strength; muscle tone and walking skills are planned into everyday activities. Additionally, a private physiotherapist and speech and language therapist visit the setting regularly to offer advice and support and model specific activities and approaches, which are specifically for Milly. This support is paid for by Milly's parents.

What difference has it made to Milly?

The SENCo feels that Milly has made very significant progress over the time she has been attending the nursery. Milly has made relationships with other children and has been to a birthday party of another child. She has started to build relationships with a wider range of adults. She has gained in confidence and independence and enjoys nursery. She has also made progress in targeted areas.

Milly's parents have seen the impact on her development in the following ways:

- From January 2015 – August 2015, Milly learnt to sit and prop herself up. This was entirely due to the intensive work; one hour every day, undertaken by her keyworker and SENCo. The partnership and communication between them supported Milly to make a massive step forward and be able to see the world from a seated position rather than lying down.
- Milly is able to use both hands in a supported manner. She could track objects and develop her ability to concentrate. These were huge leaps in both physical and cognitive development.
- Since then, Milly has made progress in gross motor skills as well as speech and communication and the understanding of daily activities.
- Milly has grown in strength; she has developed her muscles in her back. She can coordinate herself to turn around whilst seated; she can get up from lying down and can stand against something. Her communication has improved as she is able to watch and maintain attention, makes choices, track objects, developed sensory touch, socialises with peers, understands visual instructions, makes contact to seek attention, shows when she needs comfort and selects a choice of activities.
- Milly has an understanding of how to make choices due to the strategies used consistently between home and nursery. Milly is able to understand that she needs to do something when she hears 'ready, steady go' and then she will move and motivate herself. The shared common strategies have allowed instructions to be continually reinforced, explained and understood by Milly.

What difference has it made to the whole setting?

The whole staff team have recognised that inclusion means that everyone plays a role in ensuring that practice reflects the ethos. There is high value given to ensuring that all children are unique and need the adults to understand and meet their different needs. The practitioners working closely with Milly and her family and other professionals have benefitted from a new understanding of specific approaches and ways to support an individual child.

Keys to success

- Willingness and openness to work with parents and other professionals to understand and support Milly.
- Recognising the views and wishes of Milly and her parents and responding to them.
- High quality universal practice to build upon.
- Committed practitioners and willingness to learn.
- Strong inclusive ethos from the leadership team.
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<http://socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer/family-information-service-directory/3418/the-natural-childcare-company-shirley/> - The Natural Childcare Company Ltd

<http://socialsolihull.org.uk/localoffer/education/children-and-young-peoples-send-service/educational-psychology-service/early-years-send-team-2/> - Early Years Support and Assessment Team (EYSAT)