Family Engagement

By Stacy Edward



Family Engagement Project

Ely and Caerau Integrated Children's Centre
Lead practitioner: Stacy Edward, Senior Key worker (daycare)
Supported by: Becki Cullen, Teacher

The Ely and Caerau Children's Centre (ECCC) is Cardiff's only Integrated Children's Centre, and has been open and operational for families since 2005. The ECCC was built with the aim of improving health, education, the emotional development of young children, and families through an integrated approach. The Centre serves those living in the local communities of Ely and Caerau. Our community group sessions and our Daycare provision are only open to families living in the Ely and Caerau area.

The Centre provides high quality education and care through our Daycare provision, our Nursery education and Meithrin provision, our community work and our new Nursery wrap around provision. We provide both Flying Start funded places and the Childcare Offer funded places.

We offer an inclusive whole child, trauma-informed and family-supported approach to care and education. We work very closely with our partners in health, early help and inclusion.

The care and education we offer is centred around the '10 Principles of Early Childhood Education and Care' Tina Bruce, Early Childhood Education, 2015 (5th edition), Hodder Education: London.

Project Introduction

After completing The Froebel Trust short courses I was inspired to share the knowledge with our families, introducing them to the occupations as well as giving them an insight to what we do at the Centre and why. My colleague Becki and I were passionate about creating an interactive experience, so we planned engaging sessions to connect with families and showcase the activities we do at the centre.

- Clay
- Forest School
- Gardening
- Woodwork and block play
- Cooking
- Sewing and threading

The sessions were offered to all families that access the Centre including Daycare, Nursery and community room, as well as open to the community. The sessions ran over a six week course, one session a week for two hours. The families had the opportunity to attend all six sessions or pick the ones that they were interested in. The six sessions were run twice,the first cohort in the Autumn term and the second cohort in the Spring term. The sessions became fully booked within a few days of advertising.

Each family received a gift bag at the end of each session with items linking to the session allowing them to engage at home. The sessions not only provided families with hands on experiences but also offered a glimpse into the educational practices and values we uphold at the centre.

Clay

We set up the room as we would for the children, providing the adults with an insight to the atmosphere we create for the children. Natural light, music playing quietly in the background and the materials set up with a variety of choices. This set up encourages exploration and creativity, allowing everyone to engage with the clay uniquely.



Childcare was provided for the first hour, giving us the opportunity to discuss with the adults the benefits of exploring clay, the various ways it can be explored and how we introduce clay to the children. After our discussion we invited the adults to explore the clay before the children joined us, allowing them to become completely immersed in their exploration. It was lovely to see how quickly the adults became engrossed in exploring and creating.









After an hour the children joined their families to explore the clay together, even with the increased numbers the atmosphere remained calm and relaxed. The children quickly became engaged, eager to show their family members how they use the clay. This is a great example of the joy and creativity that clay exploration brings while fostering a collaborative learning experience, creating memories and reinforcing how beneficial these activities are.







As the children demonstrated exploring clay with their feet, parents were able to see the joy and sensory experience involved. With some parents joining in, it was a fun and tactile experience. Each family received a gift bag that included clay, clay tools, loose parts and a QR code. This QR code provided a gateway to further information about the benefits of exploring clay. The gifts and information provides the families an opportunity to continue the experience at home, helping families to not only build on their understanding of clay exploration but to build bonds with each other aswell as continue their creative journey.



Forest School

For our forest school session we asked the families to meet us with the children at a local woodland area where we take the children for our forest school sessions. We curated a range of engaging activities for their exploration, they included:



- Painting with mud
- Conker rolling
- Clay with natural materials
- Fairy garden
- Tea party
- Making bird feeders
- Exploring the area
- Exploring the stream

Our two hour session was a journey of discovery through the activities and woodland areas. Our snack break provided the perfect opportunity for us to share the benefits of forest school and connecting with nature. Exploring the stream captivated the children (and some adults!) the most, reaffirming that the natural world is indeed the ultimate learning environment.

The families each received a gift bag with items to continue their adventures and ignite their curiosity. The gifts came in a drawstring bag, allowing them to carry their gifts with ease and to add any treasures they found. We included a magnifying glass, bug pot, a net and scavenger hunt sheet. These items provide opportunities for families to explore and bond together. We hope the tools will inspire adventures and many memories.







Gardening

Our gardening session took place in our community garden where we offered a variety of hands on activities.

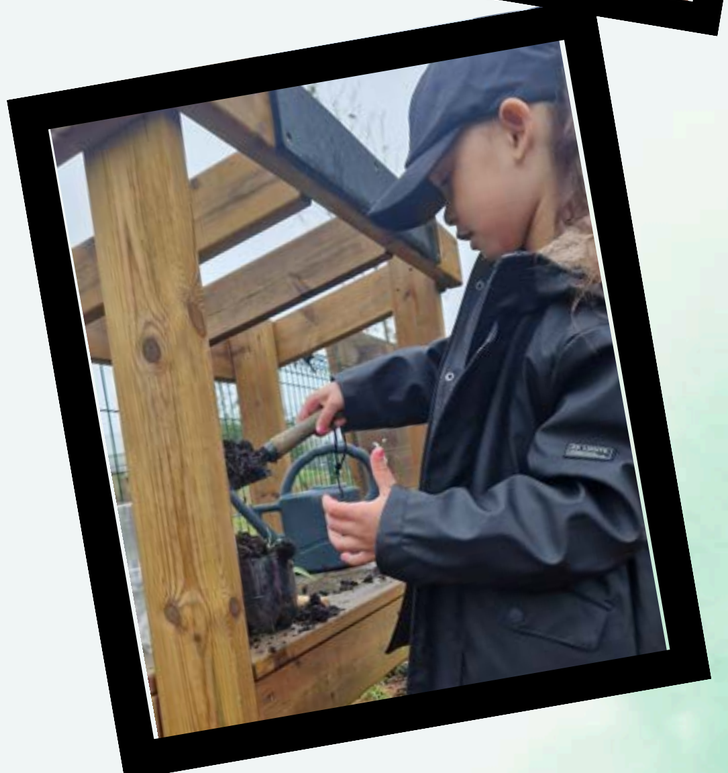
- Planting herbs for the mud kitchen
- Planting seeds in pots to take home
- Painting with mud
- Bird watching
- Bug hunting
- Den building
- Building a bug hotel
- Mud kitchen



During our snack break, we discussed how gardening can benefit children, from enhancing fine motor skills to promoting mindfulness and appreciation for nature. We hope that the experience will inspire families to engage in gardening activities together.

Each familiy received a gift bag, the gift bags are more than just a collection of gardening items, they're an invitation to explore and grow together. The bags included seeds, bulbs, gardening gloves, gardening tools and a QR code that explains the benefits gardening can offer children, from fostering a love of nature to developing life skills.











Woodwork & Block Play

We ran this session similar to the clay session where the adults joined us without the children for the first hour, allowing us to focus on discussing the benefits of woodwork and block play and how we facilitate this at the centre. The adults then had the opportunity to engage in woodwork themselves, again it was wonderful to see them become engrossed with what they were creating. Even with some adults saying they are not confident when it comes to using tools, they were soon creating masterpieces.

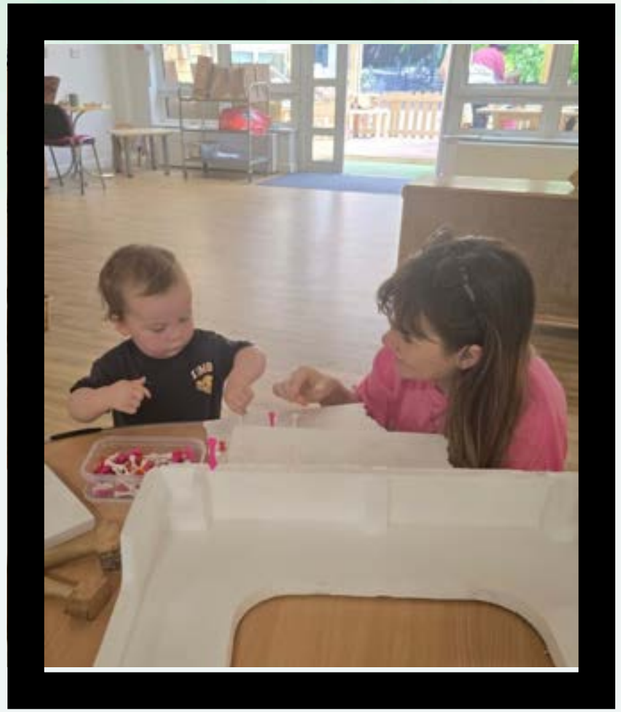
After the first hour the children joined us, where they had the oppotunity to explore the blocks and woodwork area. We also provided mallets to hammer golf tees into pumpkins for the forst cohort and into polystyrene for the second.







Each family received a selection of items to kickstart their woodwork journey. The gifts included blocks of balsa wood, a screwdriver, screws, loose parts and safety glasses. Additionally each bag contained a QR code to provide a further insight into the beneftits of woodwork and block play, along with a list of materials that we use for woodwork. We hope that with these resources families are equipped to continue their woodwork journey at home.







Cooking

The first cooking session we started by chopping seasonal vegetables to make vegetable skewers. While the skewers were cooking the families got busy making individual apple crumbles. While the crumbles was baking the families had the opportunity to taste their vegetable skewers. They also had the opportunity to make fruit smoothies and explore the setting. We provided playdough in the home corner with weighing scales, rollers and cutters. While the children were exploring the setting we discussed with the adults the benefits of involving children in meal preparation and cooking.

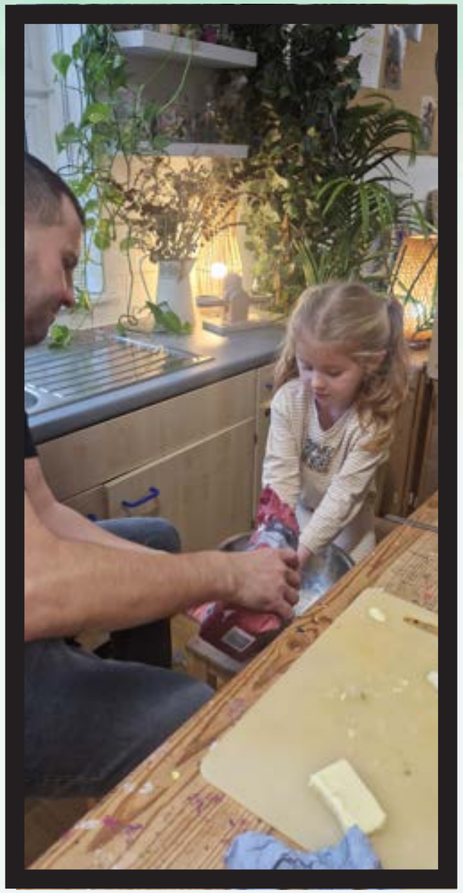
After reflecting on the first cooking session, we realised it was a bit ambitious. So for the second cooking session we focused on making apple crumbles and fruit smoothies, ensuring the session was more relaxed and enjoyable.







Each family were given a gift bag containing a child safe chopping knife, chopping board and personalised apron. Also a QR code sharing the benefits of cooking and including children in preparing meals. Plus easy to follow recipes.







Sewing & weaving

We sructured this session similar to the clay and woodwork sessions. The adults joined us for an hour were we discussed the benefits of sewing, weaving and threading and how we offer this throughout the centre. The adults then had the opportunity to take part in activities before the children joined them. The activities we set up were:

- Loom weaving
- Sewing on binca and fabric
- Threading with pasta and buttons
- Exploring fabrics

The room was set out how we would for the children with soft lighting, low music playing in the background and a selection of materials to use. The adults became immersed in their creations. After an hour the children joined us and explored the activities with their families.







Each family received a gift bag containing, plastic sewing needles, thread, buttons, beads, fabric and an embroidery hoop. Also included was a QR code sharing the benefits of sewing and weaving.







Gift bags



Clay



Forest School



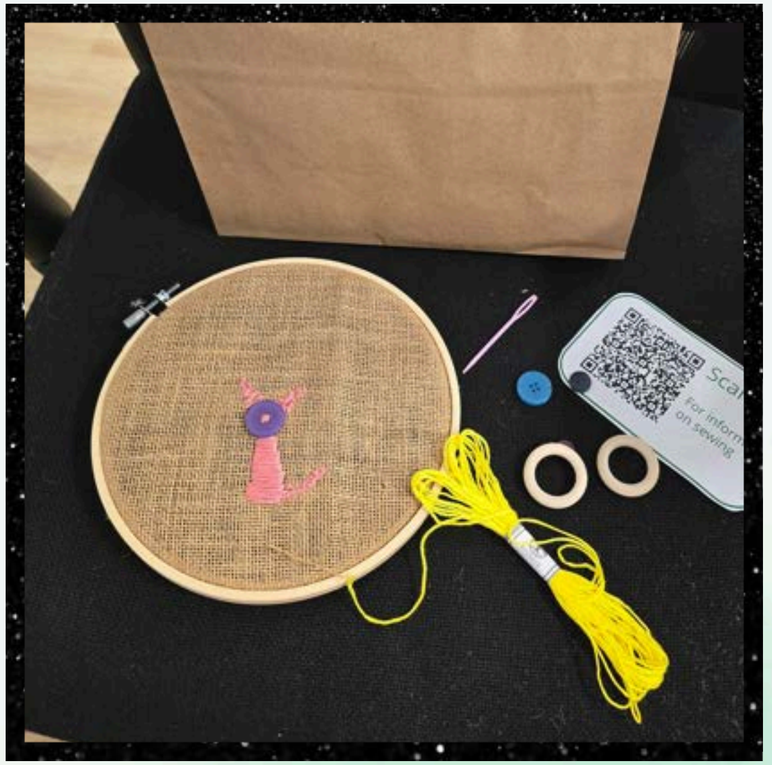
Garden



Cooking



Woodwork



Sewing

QR links

Here are the links for each session. Feel free to take a look.

Woodwork: https://sites.google.com/cardiffeccc.cymru/woodwork/home

Clay: https://sites.google.com/cardiffeccc.cymru/clay/home

Cooking: https://sites.google.com/cardiffeccc.cymru/cooking/home

Gardening: https://sites.google.com/cardiffeccc.cymru/gardening/home

Sewing: https://sites.google.com/cardiffeccc.cymru/sewingandweavinginfosheet?usp=sharing

Outdoors: https://sites.google.com/cardiffeccc.cymru/outdoorsecicc/outdoors

Family Quotes

"A fab session, Liv loved it and has used the gifts received regularly!"

"One of my favourite sessions. It encouraged the children to open their palates to new tastes as they had made the food. They were proud sharing what they had made with the family at home. Personalised aprons very cute touch. Thank you"

"All sessions were fantastic and thoroughly enjoyable. We learned so much and being able to replicate at home with the gifts was brilliant. Every parent should do them!! Thank you."

"Really good calming/grounding activity. Background music nice touch too. Good that it followed a play session for the kids to allow them to burn off some energy first."

"A really well planned session that we thoroughly enjoyed."

Family Quotes

"How beneficial (and essential) a holistic approach to learning is for a child’s development."

"We thoroughly enjoyed it, thank you so much! It's so lovely to get everyone outside together. We'd definitely be interested in future sessions"

"Fantastic fun session. We loved it. Can't wait to take the girls on a walk to the forest and use the ideas from the session. Thank you"

"Felt very privileged to be able to come and enjoy the workshop with Ava. To see her in her environment and gain knowledge and understanding of how she is learning in her nursery setting. Thank you for all the effort made. Very much enjoyed."

"It was really lovely to have some quiet time with just the adults to have a play first, it was so therapeutic. Then loved watching all the children get stuck in and have a go. Thank you so much, we all loved it and the gifts, so kind!"

Reflection

Reflecting on our sessions, we truly saw the positive impact they had. Becki and I felt they were successful in illustrating the benefits of our approach to families. The sessions weren't just about sharing information, they were about creating opportunities for genuine engagment. These interactions were invaluable in building stronger relationships with families. Ultimately these connections are cruical. They help us understand our children more deeply.













After each session we asked the families to fill in an electronic feedback form. This helped us understand their experiences and perceptions. The response was overwhelmingly positive. Families not only enjoyed the sessions but also expressed a desire for more regular sessions. Additionaly the feedback highlighted that the gifts we provided were not only appreciated but were also useful for continuing the activities at home. We couldn't have asked for a better outcome.

This feedback has been invaluable, it reinforced the effectiveness of our approach and has motivated us to continue on offering these enriching experiences within the centre.

Reflecting on the success we've had, it's clear that the sessions made a real difference. Based on the positive feedback we've received, we're excited to annouce that we'll be continuing these sessions. Instead of the previous six week format, we will be offering one session every half term. We're hoping this will help us reach more families throughout the year, allowing us to continue building and nurturing those important connections.





