

## HNC in Childhood Practice West Lothian College **Childminders used for Placements Pilot** October - December 2016

### **Background**

During the Scottish Funding Council Childcare Expansion meeting in June 2016, the need for more quality placement opportunities was discussed. I advised that childminders could be used to provide placements for the HNC in Childhood Practice and SCMA would welcome the opportunity to complete a pilot with one of the colleges.

This proposal was met with interest from Alison Malcolm, Policy Officer with the Funding Council and Michele Doull, Acting Depute Centre Head at West Lothian College.

### **Planning**

Michele Doull and Ann Marie McAllan from West Lothian College and myself met in August to discuss how the placements would work in practice, and we agreed:

- The childminder must be educated to at least SVQ III level or HNC in an appropriate subject.
- Two childminders to provide placement opportunities from 10 October 2016. Placements would take place four days a week for six weeks. Flexibility is required to ensure student is present for at least one transition time each day.
- The students will focus on the first SVQ Unit and their Practice Folio, including:
  - Describing the setting, checking policies and procedures are in place.
  - Health and Safety.
  - Supporting Play activities and Learning and Development with integrated planning to include suggested improvements and evaluation for three different activities.
- One assessor visit will be required to access the setting, and assess the student. Expected duration to be approx. 40 minutes.
- SCMA confirmed the childminder held valid Public Liability Insurance to cover this activity and informed the Care Inspectorate of the situation, who provided additional guidance on the practicalities. This information proved useful to ensure the placement was of benefit to all involved.
- The childminders would be required to care for one child under the age of three years, and would need to gain consent from their parents, and ask for permission for photos to be taken.

Ruth Sherpa, SCMA Childminding Development Officer for West Lothian approached childminders in the area to gauge their interest in taking part in the placements.

### **Implementation**

Michele Doull visited the childminders with Ruth Sherpa prior to the placements commencing to ensure they understood their roles, responsibilities and the terms and conditions of the placements.

The placements were launched and feedback has been extremely positive from all involved. The placements have also opened the door for childminders to attend West Lothian College's newly refurbished playroom with their minded children, enabling students to engage more with the children.

One of the most positive comments has been that other childminders are now feeling that they could provide placements – this is exactly what we hoped for.

## **Play Session Pilot**

A further development has been that West Lothian College is now offering sessions to childminders and their minded children to come along for a morning or afternoon play session. A group of students have planned and implemented play activities as part of their course assessment. A classroom at the college has been refurbished to act as a practical playroom, and this is one of the ways the students are now using the room. This also supports the college's partnership with childminders, the private sector and builds on the aims of our pilot.

## **Benefits of the Placements**

- Raises the profile of childminding as a profession, and promotes learning as a career route into childcare.
- Potentially more attractive to older students or those with children, as it may encourage more people to start up their own business in the face of growing demand ahead of the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare.
- Potential to attract more childminders to undertake additional study at this or other levels.
- Broadens the pool of work-based learning opportunities for both the college and students to utilise as part of their learning – especially in a challenging market.

## **Key Note:**

Students are given the opportunity for much more responsibility than they would in a nursery placement and the opportunity to work with a mixed age group.

The range of learning experiences is greater than a nursery placement as the student get to go out and about in the community, mix with other childminders and often care for school-age children later in the day.

## **Lara Haken, childminder in West Lothian**

"I think it has been a positive experience for both Nicole [student] and I. Nicole has had the opportunity to engage with children in a new more informal fashion and the children have enjoyed the added and varied input from another adult.

"I believe this and future placements whether with myself or with other childminders will advance ties between the college and other organisations such as SCMA and offer an alternative view of childcare."

## **Ailsa Robb, childminder in West Lothian**

"The parents were all very supportive, and said that if I thought it was okay, then they were happy to proceed.

"The children were excited about having someone new coming, but I did still wonder if they may feel nervous with someone new - I needn't have worried. Emma came in on day one, and immediately started to build a relationship with the children.

"We are now four weeks into the placement, and Emma has been fantastic. I believe that this pilot has been a positive experience for me and the children. It enabled me to look at my practices and procedures with fresh eyes, and bring enhancements to my service.

"Do I think that this pilot should be extended? Absolutely! I am delighted that childminding is being recognised as relevant to childcare courses, and that students are being given the opportunity to see the different childcare options available to parents."

## **Ruth Sherpa, SCMA Childminding Development Officer for West Lothian**

"I collected feedback from both childminders and this is detailed above. When asked to rate the experience to-date, with 'one' being poor and '10' being excellent, the ratings given were an 'eight' and a 'nine'."

### **Michele Doull, Acting Depute Centre Head, West Lothian College**

“Both students have shared the view of a very positive experience. One student is a mature student and the other has progressed internally from Level 6 having come from school the previous year.

“Both students have said they have greatly appreciated the opportunity to engage with other childminders through participation in daily groups. The opportunity to develop positive nurturing relationships with the children has been facilitated and fostered.

“Both childminders have a busy routine that has enhanced the experience. There has been concern that they are not able to provide *all the answers* to support course assessment, and also, concerns regarding the relevance of some of the requirements of the practice folio – but this could be resolved in consultation with course tutor.

“The course tutor has also provided positive feedback. An appreciation of the setting routine was gained when a planned observation was carried out during an external group session. Her feedback reflected the positive experiences of both students.”

#### Key points:

- Student selection appears to be vital.
- Open dialogue between the college and the childminder is essential.
- The quality of the experience may be dependent upon the weekly schedule of the childminder.
- A shared placement may be the solution to some of the issues raised.

### **Alison Malcolm, Policy Analysis Officer, Scottish Funding Council**

“I have spoken to several colleges and there is potential scope for placements to roll out more widely in 2017-18.

“We are supportive of any opportunities for students to receive high quality work-based learning experiences, whether they are mandatory through regulated courses such as HNC or even just to introduce students studying at a lower level to the realities of home-based childcare and the opportunities for a professional career in childminding.”

### **Future Placements**

Ruth Sherpa is going to invite childminders interested in being part of the next phase to a Network Meeting event where there will be a live Q&A with Michele and the students and childminders who have already participated in the pilot. There will also be a presentation to showcase the students working in the new playroom at the college.

### **Additional points to note:**

The play sessions offered to childminders played a valuable part in the pilot as the engagement has been very positive and the college no longer seems to be such a daunting partner.

Compared to private sector placements, the opportunity to engage with other adults appears to be increased in the childminding setting.

For more information, please contact:

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