

Interview with Joanne Shaw, manager of the Wrap Around Service of Midlothian Council

What is the Wrap Around Service?

We are an early years child care service. We offer out of hour's preschool support. We opened our service in 2001 and work from two centres. Our service runs from 7.30am until 5.45pm. So parents can bring their child in at say 7.30am, we will look after them till 9am when they will go through to preschool till 12noon, when we will get the children again over lunch. Some children are just joining at lunch time to attend afternoon preschool. We will take them back to nursery and again will collect any children that are staying on after 3.15pm when preschool finishes. Our service is childcare based and our team leaders are qualified early years workers. The service is based on what children would do at home. We do have planned activities but we also have toys that children will find at home, if the children want to watch a bit of TV they can, if they want to sit and read a book they can.

Joanne was asked a number of questions around her experience of using the Continuous Learning Framework within her team. Here is what she had to say:

Where did you first hear about the Continuous Learning Framework?

From my own line manager. She had been part of a group of people asked to become involved in the framework's development. She asked if we would be interested in becoming a pilot project using the framework. After a visit from one of the staff who had developed the framework, I thought okay in principal it may be useful, but I wanted the agreement of the staff team.

When you first saw the framework did you understand it?

No. I needed to go over it a couple of times. The support of the staff member involved in the framework's development was invaluable. She came out initially to spend time with me going over the framework and how it works. The second time she spoke to the whole staff team, this time I found myself having more of an understanding of how it could benefit us, whereas the staff team were saying they were not sure.

Throughout the period of us looking at how we were going to use the framework I was able to phone or email her just for clarity and to talk things through again. I don't think we would have been as far on as we are in using the framework without the support.

In what way did you and your staff team decide to use the Continuous Learning Framework?

After the team had looked at the framework we decided to look at the personal capabilities more closely. It was clear to me that one of the areas in particular we needed to look at was confidence; I am working with a highly skilled staff team who lacked confidence in their abilities. At a staff meeting, I shared my assessment of how we could use the framework to build confidence and the staff

team agreed. Before we started working on anything the staff wanted ground rules established with agreement on the boundaries around the framework. We agreed that the framework would be used in general terms within team meetings to explore work practice and performance. There would be no examples used that resulted in individuals feeling that we were talking about them. The framework was to be used as an opportunity to talk about team function as a whole, about situations we may be faced with and how as a team we would hope to deal with the situation. We agreed that there were six personal capabilities we wanted to work on. We decided to look at these two at a time, and collectively agreed that the first areas identified were confidence and dealing with conflict.

How did you get started at looking in more detail at these personal capabilities?

We looked at all 13 personal capabilities, and agreed which stage we were at, whether it was the engaged stage or established etc. We always seemed to be marking ourselves at the engaged or established stage; maybe it was modesty or that fact that we aren't all that good at saying "we are really good at this". However as we sat and spoke it through we realised that for some of the personal capabilities we were at the accomplished stage and in one area we even marked ourselves as exemplary, that felt very strange saying that we were exemplary at something. We narrowed this then down to six that we wanted to work on, from there we decided to work on two to begin with.

The team really opened up to exploring how they work, the framework gave us the grounding to work out a base line to work from and one that all of us or most of us agreed on. It offered the opportunity to challenge people's perception of how, as a team, we were working. For example, if some team members felt that we were working to a higher level than the rest of us felt we were, we were able to challenge that, saying are we really doing that?, is that really where we are at?

It was a great opportunity to really sit down and look at what we do and how we do it. As I said earlier we are working on two personal capabilities. We want to get them to the point that we feel they are solidly at the accomplished stage, really firmly rooted there, then we want to start looking at another one of the others in the six we identified. We don't want to put the two capabilities that we have been concentrating on away, we want to keep an eye on them but concentrate on adding in a third one, and when that is accomplished we will move that over and start on the next one.

Q What differences in the staff team are you seeing now that you are using the Continuous Learning Framework?

It is hard to give clear evidence to you that the framework is the reason things are changing. I have to use the councils PDP/Appraisal system, and it is hard to incorporate the framework into that system. But I do see a difference in the staff team since we introduced the framework. There are staff members who have just grown in confidence and reflection skills. People are phoning me up that

would never have done so in the past wanting to talk through issues, reflect on what they are doing.

I see a team that is working together more, support and challenge each other and seem happier to be at work. If I am in the service, people are asking to speak to me about work practice instead of allowing things to build up until they were saying they can't cope anymore. The team are talking through difficulties at an earlier point, way before it gets too much to deal with. The team meetings are more shared, I used to do all the talking, I was the only person that had an agenda, and very rarely did anyone chip in with a point of view. Now the staff are sharing their views, ideas. There is a shared agenda and we don't always get through it, there is more discussion, more shared decision making and there is more shared problem solving.

When I go into the services now the staff just look and seem happier at their work, they are more engaged. Team members are becoming more confident in identifying areas of training that they feel they need and are asking if the training is available. The staff aren't saying "I think I am becoming more confident because I am using the framework", but I as their manager am seeing the difference. Staff who previously would never have looked at going on training events on their own are now off doing the necessary training by themselves, and are feeding back on how they found the training, speaking to people from other agencies about their experiences and are keen to go on to do other training.

The other thing that the team wanted to introduce was that I would arrive unannounced and observe a piece of practice. The team wouldn't know who I was observing, I would just be there watching what is going on. I would then come back to the office, write up my observation and then set a date to feed it back to the individual. The form was drawn up with the staff team. The process was we set the ground rules of how we were going to use the framework, we then agreed where we thought we were using the stages in the personal capabilities, we then agreed how we would go about gathering evidence of our capability, what we needed to do. One of the things that came from it was the idea of direct observation and the feedback form. This gave me and the worker an opportunity to explore how a piece of work had been done, what went well and what didn't, and to agree the way forward. It opened up the dialogue and offered a way of reflecting on the practice.

How long have you and your team been working on the two personal capabilities?

From when we were asked to be a pilot project, we took our time, we didn't rush into it, and we wanted to work out systems that would work for us. It has been about a year, I have been doing the direct observations for about six months. I think after the summer holidays, once we have looked at the PDPs, we will at the team meeting review where we think we are at with the two capabilities then hopefully start looking at the next one, if people feel we are ready.

What would you say are the framework's areas of weakness?

At the beginning we would have said "oh it's really long winded and I don't understand it". I know when I first showed this to the team they took one look at it and said we will never be able to do that. It is daunting at the beginning but when you work with it a wee while, it starts making more sense, feeling more manageable. We went along to an event where other people were talking about how they were using it - that was very helpful and interesting; you were able to pick up on how others had used it and what worked for them. It is not something that you pick up and say "right we are going to start using this tomorrow" it does take time, but once you have a system in place and you know how you want to use it its good.

What do you think the main benefits of using the framework have been?

It is the difference in the team. I used to go out to the services and just get a vibe that something was just not right, you would spend ages trying to figure out what it was and then dealing with it. However now, there is shared ownership, people will name the issues and try to find ways of constructively dealing with them. There is more clarity of roles and responsibilities. Now in staff induction we are talking about where they sit in the organisation, what the roles are. The greatest benefit was that when you looked at the personal capabilities it gave you some grounding to start from with the team, we didn't have that before and we were coming at it from all different angles, I found this really useful. The team found it really useful, in that they could see and talk about where we are at now in our practice, where we want to get to and how we are going to get there. What I am finding is that as well as looking at it from a team view point, individuals are saying this is where I think I am working from, this is where I really want to get to, and this is what might help me get there. It is really helping people stop and look at the way they are working and where they want their practice to be.

On the next page you will find an example of the observation sheet used by the wrap around service.

WRAP AROUND CARE Observation Sheet

Name: Team Leader

Date: _____

Observation	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with children. • Peripheral vision of room. • Carrying out activities. • Interaction with other members of staff. • Interaction with parents/carer. 	<p>Very good interaction with the children whilst carrying out activities and during the observation. Caring and thoughtful. Excellent diffusion of challenging behaviour from a few of the children. Using quiet voice to calm children down.</p> <p>Very observant regarding what is going on in the room, aware of different situations. Encouraging other children at different parts of the room.</p> <p>Got the children to help, chatted with them whilst working. Children helped to carry cardboard out to recycling bin. Activities changed as weather permitted outdoor play.</p> <p>Interacted well. Both team members knew what was expected of them and this was carried out. Friendly.</p> <p>Friendly, quiet. Gave information on child when asked. It was discussed that **** should speak to parents more and pass on information regarding their child's day without having to be prompted by the parent. **** agreed to do this but said she didn't always feel confident talking to certain parents. It was agreed to discuss this again at a later date.</p>

Co-ordinators Signature: _____

Staff's Signature: _____