

A team EFFORT

Creating a culture of good practice can depend upon retaining good staff, and that means developing good interpersonal relationships, says **Marion Breslin**...

At Carlton Hill I am very fortunate to have retained a stable staff team over the years that have past since I took charge of the nursery in 2006. This stability has helped us to progress from a 'satisfactory' Ofsted rating to an 'outstanding' one in June 2010. We have grown from a team of 10 staff members to 18, retaining experienced people whilst introducing new students, apprentices and newly qualified staff into our team as the capacity of the nursery has increased. This success can be attributed to a number of different factors, but I believe the most important has been developing good interpersonal relationships, a sense of unity, enthusiasm and responsibility for the role we have in providing high-quality care and education for the youngest members of our community.

Team players

I do not believe in focusing on a hierarchy system, and even though I am the manager at Carlton Hill, I still undertake duties that each and every one of my team do on a daily basis. As a leader I aim to provide the best possible role model for each of our staff teams. We all have different job titles, but at the end of the day we are all working together to achieve the goal of providing excellence. Most teams are very diverse groups and there is no avoiding the hard times when there are disagreements and times when difficult decisions have to be taken, but I believe that developing effective relationships with all, and between all, team members creates respect, success and job satisfaction, thus minimising the occurrence of difficult situations.

As a leader it is important to be an approachable and caring person, and to try to create a working environment that reflects this. I do my best to take time each day to say "Thank you", as I am very aware that with the increasing pressure of fulfilling targets, too much pressure can be put on staff members, with the result that the fun and enjoyment of



just being with the children can be lost.

So much good practice is in evidence within the nursery on a daily basis, and taking the time to value each practitioner's individual contribution is important, even when time is in short supply. Whether this is commenting on how lovely their engagement with a child was, how nice a display looks, how well they dealt with a parent or how they gave a little extra bit of help without being asked to do so, it all helps to demonstrate that you appreciate the job that they are doing. Every now and then after nursery events such as parents evenings, inspection days or days when we all have to give that little bit extra, I bring in treats and write a little message of thanks for all the staff's hard work. These small acts of kindness fuel happiness and a sense of work achievement, and can help deliver continued success.

Communication is key

Investing time in each member of the team is important, and this includes making sure informal communication takes place daily and that formal supervision takes place on a regular basis. This is something that is always hard to achieve with the hectic day-to-day functioning of the nursery, but it is vital for

maintaining relationships with practitioners as well as providing time to discuss performance and development.

Carlton Hill is part of a larger organisation, the London Early Years Foundation (LEYF). This organisation places a lot of importance on giving practitioners the ability to be involved in decision making that affects the nursery and the way we provide our service. Practitioners are invited to join in sounding boards and working groups to review policies, job descriptions and performance

management frameworks. Giving practitioners and staff at every level of the organisation the opportunity to be involved in this way is vital, as they are the ones who will be expected to work within any new guidelines or policies introduced on the ground.

It can be hard work creating a working environment where everyone respects and supports each other, but it is worth the perseverance, as having a stable, experienced, motivated and flexible team makes the job of the manager much easier.



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MARION BRESLIN



findoutmore

Marion Breslin is nursery manager of Carlton Hill Community Nursery, an 'outstanding' setting run by the London Early Years Foundation. For more details, visit leyf.org.uk



Power to the EYP

GIVING STAFF EXTRA RESPONSIBILITY AND INVITING THEM TO CONTRIBUTE CAN IMPROVE QUALITY AND BOOST COMMITMENT...

Within my nursery everyone has an additional area of responsibility such as ECAT lead, student mentor, parent engagement lead and co-workers to the SENCO and EYFS coordinators. Taking on this extra responsibility gives the practitioner experience of undertaking multi-agency working and develops confidence in their professional abilities. We have a team meeting every month and I try to ensure that the agenda is well-balanced with contributions and feedback from most practitioners rather than just management.

Taking part in team building exercises is also a good way to develop positive relationships. I always try to end a meeting on a positive note with everyone having shared a nice comment about each other's practice or what they like best about our nursery. It's easy to focus on the negative and the things we need to improve upon; it's harder to praise ourselves for the contribution we make as organisation, as a nursery and as individuals.