

moving ON up



Although nervous at first, **Clare Mills** has found studying for an Early Years Foundation Degree to be an invaluable experience...

What experience and qualifications did you have before starting the Early Years Foundation Degree?

Clare Mills: I've been working in nurseries for around 10 years. I started off in a private day nursery, which is where I obtained my NVQ level 2 and 3 as part of a work-based apprenticeship scheme.

Once I received my qualifications and had experienced working in all three rooms I began to look at how I could progress. A post came up in the baby room of a brand new nursery, so I applied and was given the job.

Over the next five years I worked my way up to deputy manager – even leading the nursery for a few months while the manager was away. Having built up my skills, I began searching for another challenge and accepted the role of nursery leader at Portsmouth High School.

What prompted you to start studying for EYP status?

CM: I'd been at Portsmouth High School for about a year when I was given the option of studying for a foundation degree. It was an excellent opportunity for me to further my career; the training was funded and the school was really supportive. I was given one day off a week so that I could go to university in the morning and spend the afternoons researching.

Once I go back in September I have to top up my foundation course to either EYP status, or a BA(Hons). I'm not sure whether this is something I'll do straightaway. I think I might want to have a little break!

What are the main subjects and issues that you have covered?

CM: We've done a lot of work on child protection and finding out about different theorists' perspectives on childcare and the early years. I feel like I've gained a lot of skills. For instance, every year you have to deliver a presentation and that's been such a good experience – if not a little scary at times! We also do a lot online. There's a portal called Victory where you can access units or work and discuss topics and ideas with other people on the course.

Do you learn much from other nursery practitioners on the course?

CM: Absolutely. That's been one of the really nice things. There's a lot of discussion and people come from such a variety of backgrounds. There are nannies, child-minders, nursery managers and nursery owners. You learn so much from other people and there's a real community feel.



How have your studies changed the way you think about the early years?

CM: I think every unit we've done has impacted upon my practice. The key word at university is 'reflect'. You're really encouraged to talk about how you work and what your setting is about.

We did a big unit on ICT and how it encompasses so much more than just computers. It really opened my eyes and I was able to apply a lot of what we learnt to my setting. We now make use of all the ICT that surrounds the children, from the small fridge in our classroom to the video camera that show us when parents come to buzz in at the gate.

We also spent time discussing the outside area, which is something we wanted to address at our nursery. People brought in photos of their own settings, which gave us some new ideas, and we looked at how the indoor layout should be mirrored outdoors.

How many hours a week do you dedicate to the course?

CM: When it comes up to doing an assignment I probably spend most evenings on it. This means you have to give up your social life, but it's not every week. When you're not working on an assignment you just need to attend lectures and do background reading, so the work load is less stressful.

Do you have any advice for other nursery workers thinking about embarking on an EYP?

CM: I was quite nervous about going to university as I hadn't been before and it seemed like quite a daunting thing to do. But you get so much support that people shouldn't be put off. It's really interesting and I've learnt so much that I've been able to apply to my setting. I think that's invaluable really.