

## Jeely Piece Club



The Jeely Nursery

# *Letting the children lead*

**A first interim report to the Robertson Trust**

**Heather Baldry  
Lio Moscardini**

**Centre for Educational Support  
Faculty of Education  
University of Strathclyde**

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## **JEELY NURSERY/ROBERTSON TRUST PROJECT 2007 – 2010**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This is the first interim report undertaken for the Robertson Trust (RT) of an ongoing project developed by the Jeely Nursery (JN) in Castlemilk Glasgow 2007 – 2010.

The Robertson Trust funding has enabled the JN to initiate a radical multi faceted programme of development focussed on children living in highly adverse socioeconomic conditions who may in addition be subject to the negative effects of living in families coping with substance abuse. They represent one of the most vulnerable groups of children in contemporary society. The task ahead for the nursery staff is complex, challenging and long term, requiring a high degree of consistency and commitment to both professional and personal growth. There is no question that the challenge is understood and accepted at all levels; that commitment to the project is well established and that a high level of motivation is sustained in spite of a number of difficult circumstances occurring over the year, unrelated to the project.

In these initial stages the JN have concentrated on setting in place the necessary structures and procedures required to support and sustain the project over time. They have engaged upon radical changes in traditional nursery practice involving intensive training programmes for pre-five workers initially and latterly expanding to include a parent with a child involved in the initiative. The achievements as summarised below are commendable;

- *Change management*

Management of change has been strategic. The Nursery Head has developed a successful good practice model in the management of the staff, particularly in respect of the theoretical shift that was being demanded of practitioners.

- *Pre-five worker/child*

There is evidence of coherence between new knowledge and assessment following staff development, particularly in reference to the Special Playtimes training, and the application of this learning to practice. The need to formalise assessments into existing recording frameworks is recognised.

- *Pre-five worker/parent*

Commendable flexibility and professional sensitivity is evident. The JN team have adopted an effective and responsive model that supports the involvement of parents/carers at a level with which they feel comfortable.

- *Child/parent*

Although too early to comment on this aspect of the project as yet, there is an indication that the adoption of a strategic approach shows that this outcome is being clearly targeted and some early steps have been successfully taken.

### *Conclusion*

There is no doubt that that this project holds promise of significant benefit for the children and families for which it is intended and that it has achieved considerable initial progress. There is strong leadership from the Nursery Head and committed support from the senior management team, the pre-five workers and growing evidence of support from parents. The outcomes and targets set are carefully constructed, relevant and appropriate and linked in a soundly progressive manner to the long term aims of the project. There is a sense of a firmly held and achievable vision by all on this team.

Though still in its early stages, the indications for continuing success for the project are clear and apparent. The funding provided by the Robinson Trust is found therefore by the evaluation team to be well and effectively used and clearly essential to the continuance of this valuable initiative.

# **JEELY NURSERY/ROBERTSON TRUST PROJECT 2007 – 2010**

## **CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

### **1.0 Context**

This is an interim report undertaken for the Robertson Trust (RT) of an ongoing project developed by the Jeely Nursery (JN) in Castlemilk Glasgow. The project originated in the concerns held within the nursery for the long term negative effects of highly adverse socioeconomic circumstances on the likelihood of children achieving their potential to establish emotionally stable relationships in later life, and to achieve success through their time at school. There was particular recognition of the negative implications for children living with parents who were abusing alcohol and other drugs in the home.

### **2.0 The Jeely Piece Club**

Focus by staff on the essential requirement to situate the child within his or her family setting is integral to the ethos and tradition of the JN. It was established in Castlemilk in 1975 by local parents with the aim of improving opportunities for their children. It has grown significantly during the succeeding thirty three years and has continued throughout this time to enjoy the strongly committed support of the community. Nursery staff work closely with a wide range of related professional agencies and, as a recognised training centre, offer training opportunities to other professionals and placements to local students. JN is a registered charity, a limited company and is managed by a board of directors inclusive of the parents of children attending the nursery.

The Jeely Nursery is currently regarded as one of the most successful community organisations in Scotland recognised for its development of a range of innovative and quality services for children and their families. A good example of this is the recent successful involvement in a project which focussed on addressing the devastating consequences of negative attachment, to their parents or main carers, for pre-five children. The evident success of this experience, developed and delivered by a team of play therapists from the Notre Dame Centre (NDC) in Glasgow, provided the stimulus from which the current Robertson Trust funded project developed.

### **3.0 Jeely/Robertson Project**

#### ***3.1 Background***

The recognition of the significance of emotional attachment, and the understanding asserted in recent studies (Barnard and McKeganey, 2004) that early intervention can reverse some of the negative aspects in the child-parent relationship and facilitate the forming of strong and beneficial attachment bonds constitutes the chief motivation for the current project. Without effective early intervention, there remains a strong likelihood that children living in highly adverse circumstances will be more likely to

suffer neglect and abuse, more likely to be taken into permanent care, be at risk of being assessed as aggressive, withdrawn or detached and be at risk of psychiatric disorder including major depression (ibid.). Secure attachment to parents and other significant adults is now well recognised as providing the essential basis for growing resilience and a child's capacity to learn, grow and develop in a positive and beneficial manner (Suchman et al., 2008).

Although the involvement of parents and/or main carers is central to the work of the nursery, it was clear at the early stages of the intervention developed within the JN with NDC that the initial focus for the rigorous and demanding training programme should of necessity be on the 'significant adult', in this case the pre-five workers, rather than the parents or main carers. The successful establishment of expertise within the nursery was held to be an essential prerequisite to ensure that the eventual inclusion of parents, should the intervention be successful, could be undertaken with confidence and competence.

### ***3.2 Child Staff Relationship Training (CSRT)***

The training programme provided by the play therapists was based on the pre-existing, well validated course 'Child, Parent Relationship Training' (Bratton et al., 2006). It was adjusted to focus on staff only and aimed to help strengthen the relationship between an established and consistent partnership between a pre-five worker and a child. It built on the understanding of the significance of replicating the qualities of secure emotional attachment already established in the nursery.

CSRT was/is an intensive course during which the nursery staff participated in a series of carefully structured 'Special Playtimes' (SPTs). The child and the selected worker experienced one to one play sessions where the course participants practiced and consolidated the skills and strategies introduced in the programme and demonstrated their understanding of the concepts underpinning the therapeutic aspects of the activity. The structure is strong, explicit and the guidelines for interaction and language allowed are clearly explained and obligatory. All SPT sessions took place, as a requirement, in a room or space separated from other children and adults and were videoed in order to facilitate post-session discussion and analysis. In addition, pre-five workers were/are required to record in a structured pro-forma their observations on themselves and their children for further discussion. The sessions of discussion and analysis with staff were led initially by the Notre Dame play therapists but latterly by the Depute Director Pre-Five, (referred to in this report as the Nursery Head) whose growing knowledge and expertise in this area has satisfied the professional team that her contribution is both valuable and valid. The pro-formas remain as an assessment record on the progress of the child.

### ***3.3 Special Playtime***

Briefly, the SPT, as described by Bratton et al. (2006), offers participating staff an opportunity to learn how to respond empathetically to their child's feelings, build the child's self-esteem and help him/her to develop self control and self responsibility. The desired outcome is for the staff member to create an accepting relationship in which a child feels safe to express him/herself through play e.g. fears, likes, dislikes, wishes, anger, loneliness, joy or feelings of failure. Once the play relationship has

reached the stage where children feel accepted, understood and cared for, they play out many of their problems and tensions and burdens, their self worth improves and they are able to discover their own strengths and assume greater self direction.

### ***3.4 Funding to extend the programme***

The evident and recordable progress of the benefits for children in the JN, the growth in the skill and knowledge of nursery staff and the perceived potential for the inclusion of parents in the training programme engendered an enthusiasm on the part of the JN both to continue and develop from their positive experiences of the Special Playtime. A successful application was made to the Robertson Trust for funding to enable the development of a continuing programme. The funding provided for the project a Pre-Five Senior Worker, A Pre-Five Worker and a Senior Administrator (Twenty five hours per week)

### ***3.5 Project aim***

The overarching project aim is that the Jeely Nursery will establish an appropriate and effective response to meet the needs of children vulnerable to highly adverse socioeconomic circumstances, particularly those living with parental addiction, and that this will be carried out in the full expectation that appropriate skills and experiences will be shared and developed in collaboration with parents and/or main carers within the context of their families and within the context of the nursery. The quality of the response which is developed will provide enduring benefit for both emotional resilience and long term educational success for the children identified.

### ***3.6 Participants and Training***

In addition to the intensive training for SPTs, a second less rigorous but demanding and informative course based on aspects of the above 'Playroom Implementation of Techniques' (PIT) has been delivered to all members of the nursery staff. The aim being to ensure coherence and consistency of working practice amongst all pre-five workers, for the benefit of and inclusive of children not taking part in the SPTs. Finally, with the overall aims of the project in view, a third course 'Parents Programme' (PP) (see below) was also delivered to all staff members.

In two training blocks, between 2007-2008 and in 2008, all members of staff (11) have completed PIT and PP. Nine members of staff, including the Nursery Head have completed the SPT programme.

### ***3.7 Current position***

Outcomes and targets for each year of the project have been identified. Those for year one 2007/2008 have been successfully achieved (see below) and this in the context of a series of unsettling and challenging events, unrelated to the project, which have subsequently been effectively managed and competently resolved throughout the year. It is a tribute to both management and staff of the nursery that the intensive work of the project has been sustained in difficult times and a testimony to their commitment.

The relevant progress and summary documents have been submitted to the Robertson Trust. The outcomes and targets for year two, 2008-2009, have similarly been identified and submitted.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.0 Aims and process of the evaluation**

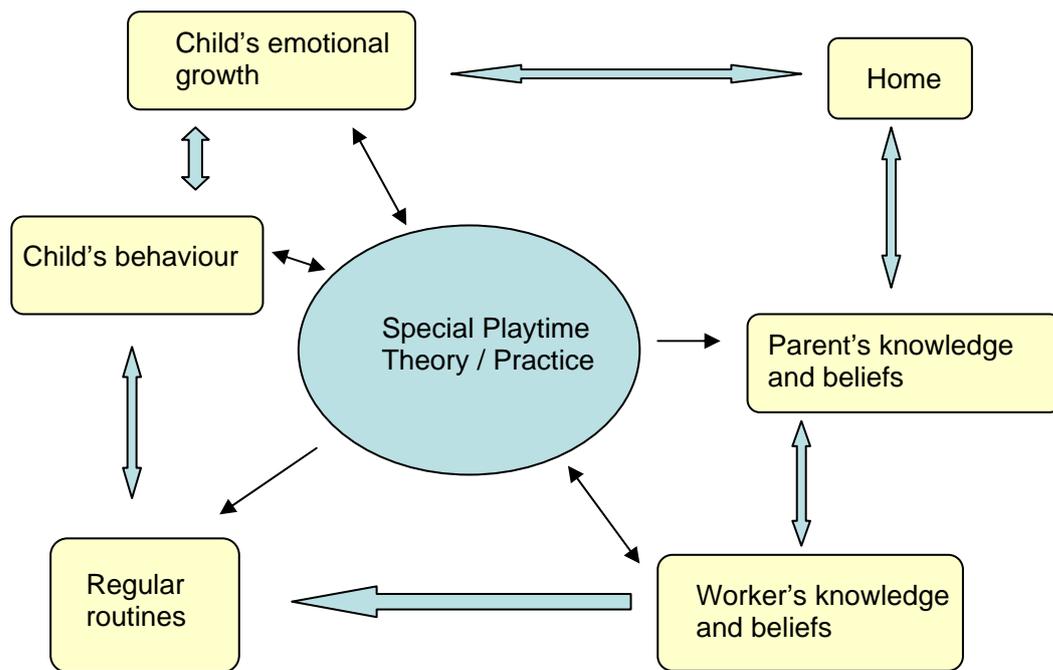
The agreed brief for the evaluation process is to look at the impact over time of the project in action, to gain evidence for the Robertson Trust Fund with regard to the progress of the project and to support the project team in planning effectively for a beneficial outcome. To this end the process is most usefully described as summative rather than formative. Regular meetings have been held between the two teams in order to identify and address issues arising from work in action and, where appropriate, to offer advice and to provide a sounding board for new ideas and future action.

#### *4.1 Focus for the evaluation*

The quality of the relationship between those who work with the children themselves, and the quality of collaboration between those who work together for the ultimate benefit of the children, separate into three discrete but interlocking categories for the purpose of the evaluation.

- Change management
- Pre-five worker/child
- Pre-five worker/parent
- Child/parent

The developments planned by the project team lie within each of the categories above. Each category has an identified set of purposeful activities focussed on addressing the broad aim for the project. Each will be investigated and analysed separately but concurrently as each phase begins, while the final report will consider the interconnectedness of each category in relation to the aims of the project as a whole. Figure 1 below, outlines these relationships diagrammatically. This diagram represents the conceptual framework that was used to frame the investigation.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of CSRT within the Jeely Nursery over an extended period of time careful consideration has been given to the type of data required to provide valid information. This evaluative process has been theoretically informed (Patton, 1990). Patton outlines a range of strategies for selecting information-rich cases through what has been described as a process of purposeful sampling. This type of sampling involves gathering relevant data from particular sources at agreed appropriate points in the project for in-depth analysis. To date this has involved semi-structured interviews with JN staff and detailed discussion with JN management regarding written reports and procedures. These interviews and discussions provided substantial data for analysis.

An in-depth study of information-rich cases will be carried out through a process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Patton outlines a range of strategies for selecting information-rich cases. Particular cases for in-depth analysis will be identified on the basis of this sampling logic at agreed appropriate points in the project.

### **5.0 Analysis and discussion: project implementation 2007-2008**

Each of the 4 categories has been addressed separately. Critical discussion will focus on activities undertaken, identification of issues raised, and the identification of future targets. Where appropriate, representative extracts from interviews with pre-five workers will be used to illustrate the points made.

### **5.1 Focus One: Change management**

There has been a significant change in work place culture and considerable progress in the development of the structures which support the change, at all levels of operation in the nursery. As well as identifying and establishing procedural guidelines, the training team and the nursery staff have successfully managed a substantial transition in working practice from a traditional conceptual framework related to *child-centred play* to a constructivist framework of *child-led play*, as addressed in the section on Special Playtime above. As an integral part of this process the pre-five workers have been involved in a high degree of personal scrutiny and closely monitored professional development.

The degree to which the transition in working practice has been achieved is indicated by comments from staff who though they initially found the training challenging -

*This is different to our nursery nurse training, we are trained to ask lots of questions, vocalisation from us is hard now.*

*Moving from child-centred to child-led was the biggest step... the language is very difficult.*

were able very quickly to explain the nature of the theoretical shift underpinning practice in the Special Playtime.

*The approach that we use in the playroom before the course was we were answering the children's questions but maybe not giving them time to explore for themselves as we do now. Now we are reflective responding and are letting the children lead more.*

*The role of the nursery nurse (usually) is child-led play, now I'm more aware of the knowledge children bring and we can help them have confidence in themselves rather than 'giving them knowledge'. We are standing back more rather than being directive.*

Staff were equally knowledgeable about attachment issues and the degree to which they underpin physical and mental well being and successful learning;

*Attachment issues are very important. A child (too afraid) to explore, won't learn, won't develop. Lack of secure attachment will affect a child through the whole of life.*

*A child can't learn or develop unless they have a good emotional attachment; it affects the whole of their behaviour.*

They were clear as to the ways in which the special playtime training had improved the professionalism of individuals;

*(I observe) more carefully, watching children, noticing their problems, knowing what to look for.*

*I feel better prepared now, it gives you more of an insight into why they are behaving the way they are and the confidence to put it across better to parents why it is happening, The training allows you to have an explanation and it makes it clearer. It highlights bonds that are problematic and makes attachment problems clearer.*

*I can spot this (lack of attachment) as a practitioner, I can fill out gaps and give the child a more rounded start to life. Definitely better equipped. It's not about fixing it, it's about letting children work through it and doing it with them. You need to feel what they feel.*

In addition, an overwhelming 'yes' was given in answer to the question, 'Do you think that the staff team (now) share a better understanding of the emotional needs of children?'

*'We can pin point issues', 'concerns at staff meetings are recorded and staff show an increased awareness of emotional need', 'we are more concerned with the with possible causes of behaviour (rather than) having meetings about behavioural issues as we did before'. 'In discussion staff are better informed at a theoretical level and at practice level. There is more attention to detail'. 'It is useful to talk as a team'. 'It brought the team together'.*

*'(There has been) an improvement in judgement and (our) shared view. It has made us more aware of the significance of what we do.'*

The impact of the training has been significant. The complex, well managed and successfully established training and the general view of the pre-five workers is well reflected in the following comment:

*Special Playtimes were so useful because of the insights they gave into children's minds.*

#### 5.1(i)Issues addressed in Focus One

The staff training procedures are rigorous and consistent with the standards held by the NDC team. Pre-five workers are monitored and supervised individually through a number of differing training strategies and the nursery manager, who leads the training, has the support of the professional play therapists to ensure close and careful monitoring during the skills building process. Training sessions are supportive and individuals move at their own pace as confidence builds with assessed success. The nursery manager describes a 'risk assessment' approach to selecting staff/child pairings for the Special Playtime sessions, with a careful matching of expertise of staff with needs/vulnerability of the children.

#### (ii)Developments arising from discussion

- Formal, written procedures to support.

- Identification and selection of children and the assessment of emotional need.
- An initial or baseline assessment of the emotional skills of children selected.
- Selection, monitoring and support of staff involved with Special Playtimes to maintain the quality of practice, ensure the ethical status of the intervention and provide consistency for children.

### ***5.2 Focus Two: Pre-Five worker/child***

As indicated above, pre-five workers report having an enhanced awareness of the significance of their contribution to the emotional development of vulnerable children and a growing recognition of the significance of the Special Playtime strategy as an effective intervention, helpful to staff and to children.

The remit for this interim report is to evaluate the effectiveness of the project at the end of the first year and therefore it could not, in such a short time, address in any detail the effects of the intervention on the participating children. Nevertheless, positive perceptions of benefit were reported by staff:

*In a Special Playtime I was following the child's lead in a sand tray, copying everything he did. The child loved every minute of it and responded without fear. I felt really good about it.*

*The encouragement we use is ... built to encourage more open responses and it definitely works. I can see children getting more out of their own play.*

On one remarkable occasion, indicating the possibility of far reaching outcomes for the project, a child demonstrated that he had begun the process of internalising the skill of self responsibility outwith the dedicated play session;

*One of the children uses Special Play Time language (spontaneously) in the general playroom.*

#### ***5.2(i)Issues addressed in Focus Two***

The well established recording and planning process used to track the progress of individual children in the nursery generally, provides the foundation for recording children involved in Special Playtimes. Staff have a sound knowledge of each child's personal circumstances including, as an imperative, knowledge of the child's family. Particular attention is paid to those for whom there may be significant issues related for instance to drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, mental or physical health. There are strong interagency links, for example with social workers, where social deprivation is indicated. This information is added to that related to assessment of the child's progress in the nursery and informs the decisions made by staff teams when planning teaching/learning activities for each individual.

In addition to this, for children involved in Special Playtime a separate record is made for each session using a pro forma which directs the pre-five worker towards specific aspects of the interaction. The assessment data is analysed and decisions about future steps are made, with support from the Nursery Head.

#### 5.2(ii) Developments arising from discussion

In accordance with the current requirement to provide for children with Additional Support Needs (Scottish Executive, 2005), formalisation of one written planning format, to record progress and provide an Individualised Educational Programme for each child in receipt of the additional support from Special Playtime, would be a constructive development. This along with other developments above would help to safeguard and sustain the project over time.

### **5.3 Focus Three: Pre-Five worker/parent**

There is evidence of an increased parental/carer involvement with positive action having been undertaken by the JN to promote and sustain this. This has been driven forward by two key programmes: the development of parenting skills through group activities as well as individual support in the home and the introduction of Parents' Personal Development Plans (PDPs).

#### 5.3(i) Family/Home Support

The use of trained staff working with parents/carers and families at home is well established in provision for pre-fives. The traditional role of the family/home supporter, working independently of the nursery and the staff who normally worked with the child and the parent, was however not one which complimented the ethos and working practice of the JN. The degree of knowledge required of the child and family in order to provide and sustain beneficial support over time was seen as crucial to developing an effective relationship between workers and parents/carers and could not be achieved by external staff imposed upon parents at random. For very vulnerable families such intervention could even be seen as a threat.

The Robertson Trust provided the funding which facilitated an extension of the home visiting team drawn from experienced and familiar nursery workers. Through using specially trained key workers in this way it has been possible to maintain a consistency and continuity from the nursery through to the home that would otherwise have not been possible. Senior staff have demonstrated that through effective time management and appropriate organisation they have played an active role in ensuring that key workers are available to work with parent/carers.

#### 5.3(ii) Parenting Courses

Senior staff members have also successfully delivered specifically designed courses for parents, developed from the NCH model, which are well validated and theoretically underpinned. The courses focus on understanding children's development; managing behaviour; children's play and crucial issues of understanding and communication.

In collaboration with the NCD team the JN have also successfully involved four parents/carers in individual Special Playtime training. The benefits have been apparent to staff as parents/carers have continued to apply these skills within the nursery and at home

The impact even at this early stage is clear from staff responses:

*Parents have commented that they understand attachment issues better. They can see a difference. (We have) very positive feedback on parent/child sessions,(They are) very popular, very beneficial.*

*(We are) working and sharing info. with parents at a deeper level. (There is) more support and reassurance for parents, (We are) learning together. Parents need to be involved and there is evidence that they are beginning to understand (their) children's behaviour better*

*(Of particular success are) parent and child in session. You see the change in the children, (they are) so much more confident.*

#### 5.3(iii) Parent Personal Development Plans

Parent/carers' Personal Development Plans are personal plans for parents that are developed in collaboration with key workers. They focus on the underlying needs of the parent/carer who is helped to identify individual goals and to specify each one within the plan. Participants engage in a range of activities to achieve each goal some of which are progressed within group activities whilst others are tackled individually. The range of needs identified is varied and may include for example debt or addiction. Accessibility issues are also indicated in cases where parents/carers require help to access particular services. An example given was of a parent taking a child to hospital and the value of having a key worker available to support the family and instil confidence and capacity in the parent/carer.

A self assessment strategy is used to evaluate success and results to date record considerable progress towards personal goals for individual parents.

Parents/carers can also choose to be involved in additional classes and activities offered, for example classes dealing with health, sex education, healthy eating. The JN adopted a flexible and pragmatic response to ensure the involvement of as many parents/carers as possible. Although thirteen parents were involved in setting out PDPs it was not a prerequisite to being involved in activities and there were a number of parents who subscribed to parent group activities who chose not to set out their own PDPs.

#### 5.3(iv) Issues addressed in Focus Two

The aspects of the project which address support for children in the context of their homes and families have indicated even at these early stages, a good measure of success. The perspective of nursery staff is well represented and progress in relation to PDPs is evident from the records taken and kept by the senior nursery staff on behalf of the participants. It remains more difficult to gather information from parents

themselves on other aspects of their involvement in the project because of the sensitive nature of the relationships with nursery staff and the real need to keep intervention into such trusting relationships to a minimum. Anecdotal evidence, offered spontaneously, indicates a positive response to the interventions to date.

### 5.3(v) Developments arising from discussion

The staff team are investigating the possibilities of non intrusive information gathering activities focussed on recording parental views and responses in order to achieve a balanced appraisal of the success of the interventions.

### **5.4 Focus Four: Child/parent**

A longer term view needs to be taken of the outcomes for this focus. In line with what can be described as ‘best practice’ the JN has introduced a strategic process of professional development with an aim of achieving positive and sustainable benefits at the level of child/parent relationship, independent of direct involvement by nursery staff . At this stage of the evaluative process any discussion of the impact of the work of JN at this level of independence would be premature. To date JN workers have gathered evidence of positive developments in these relationships. This has been through noting anecdotal evidence from parents/carers as well as observing and recording parent/child interactions.

### **5.5 Summary**

The Robertson Trust funding has enabled the JN to initiate a radical multi faceted programme of development focussed on children living in highly adverse socioeconomic conditions who may in addition be subject to the negative effects of living in families coping with substance abuse. They represent one of the most vulnerable groups of children in contemporary society. The task ahead for the nursery staff is complex, challenging and long term, requiring a high degree of consistency and commitment to both professional and personal growth. There is no question that the challenge is understood and accepted at all levels; that commitment to the project is well established and that a high level of motivation is sustained in spite of a number of difficult circumstances occurring over the year, unrelated to the project.

In these initial stages the JN have concentrated on setting in place the necessary structures and procedures to support and sustain the project over time. They have engaged upon radical changes in traditional nursery practice involving intensive training programmes for pre-five workers initially and latterly expanding to include a parent with a child involved in the initiative. The achievements as summarised below are commendable.

#### 5.5 (i) Change management

Management of change has been strategic. Model of good practice in managing people particularly in respect of the theoretical shift that was being demanded of practitioners.

#### 5.5 (ii) Pre-five worker/child

There is evidence of coherence between new knowledge and assessment following development of staff in Special Playtimes and the application of this learning to practice. The need to formalise assessments into existing recording frameworks is recognised.

#### 5.5 (iii) Pre-five worker/parent

Commendable flexibility and professional sensitivity is evident. The JN team have adopted a flexible and responsive model that supports the involvement of parent/carers at a level with which they feel comfortable.

#### 5.5 (iv) Child/parent

Although too early to comment on this, there is an indication that the adoption of a strategic approach shows that this outcome is being clearly targeted.

#### 5.5 (v) Conclusion

There is no doubt that that this project holds promise of significant benefit for the children and families for which it is intended and that it has achieved considerable initial progress. There is strong leadership from the Nursery Head and committed support from the senior management team, the pre-five workers and growing evidence of support from parents. The outcomes and targets set are carefully constructed, relevant and appropriate and linked in a soundly progressive manner to the long term aims of the project. There is a sense of a firmly held and achievable vision by all on this team.

Though still in its early stages, the indications for continuing success for the project are clear and apparent. The use of funding provided by the Robinson Trust is found therefore by the evaluation team to be well and effectively used and clearly essential to the continuance of this valuable initiative.

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