

Case study: How we are trying to create an anti-racist setting where all children feel special and feel seen.

Background

Lullabyz Nursery Ltd Newport is a private day care nursery and holiday club. The nursery opened in 2012 and has flourished over the years.

The Responsible Individual is Nicola Reed and the Person In Charge is Louise Touhig. Nicola and Louise became friends at university, where they trained to be primary school teachers together. Between them they have over fifty years' experience of working with children and are dedicated to providing the highest quality of care. They are assisted in their roles by an excellent team of staff who are highly qualified and highly committed to the nursery.

First and foremost we are one big FAMILY! When staff, children and their extended families join us, they soon become a fully-fledged members of this Lullabyz family. Staff are loving, friendly and welcoming and form close bonds with children and their carers.

How our journey started

Louise was lucky enough to participate in the DARPL training, which has since sent us on a journey of discovery with our staff and children, to explore and challenge anti-racism. Following the training Louise quickly realised that our setting is inclusive and celebratory of race and faiths, but was far from being 'anti-racist'.

As most settings do, we happily looked into each child's 'special days' and celebrated foods, traditions and clothing with their families, peers and staff. However, it was found that those everyday discussions and conversations around race were often overlooked or avoided as not to say the wrong thing and cause offence.

Following the DARPL training we felt that this way of excluding the discussions, outside of festivals and special events, and not challenging the children to pay attention, to recognise differences, to question thoughts, was adopting a colourblind approach and this became our driving force for change.

Exploring our environment and knowledge

We spent time, critically looking at our rooms and resources and asked ourselves:

Are the children represented?

Can they see themselves, their faiths and their cultures?

Can they truly feel part of our family?

From here we created an action plan, which includes creating a policy for the whole nursery, purchasing further resources and creating an open dialogue with the children and their families, building trust and truly including them in nursery life.

One of the biggest actions for us was and is, staff awareness and training. Another member of the management team has already attended DARPL training and we have other staff attending a Cohort in the Summer Term. Until then we have started in house training.



In house staff training

The staff were set thoughtful challenges during our staff meetings. They were first challenged to look at themselves as individuals, to share their own experiences, look at their own beliefs and opinions and to challenge any blind spots or bias that they might have. We discussed where this bias may have come from?

"It seems so blatant once you see/recognise the bias and I will be looking out for examples of this in the future. It's almost subliminal, which is really scary."

We continued by watching the Doll experiment on YouTube. At this time the staff didn't really have an explanation as to why so many of the children selected the white doll in response to positive questions such as which doll is the prettiest? etc, so we followed this up with examples of things children see everyday and how the world around them is already planting ideas and bias in their minds.

"Wow that's heartbreaking that the children in the video felt that way. Could it be from life experiences they have had and seen made they think that?"

"Morning Lou I have had a read through the info you have sent us, and was quite upset when watching the video, as you don't realise the impact it has on them and couldn't believe that that is how children feel themselves 🥺. I agree we need to do more to include every child and looking forward to coming up with ideas when I'm back. I've got a book here, written by George who has down syndrome and it says it doesn't matter if we all look different we are all the same.

I also watch JoJo and gran gran with my daughter every night before bed, I didn't realise how informative it is until I watched it, it's really good."

The staff were given a picture of Disney heroes and Disney Villains to look at – it didn't take long for the staff to identify the use of dark colours to represent all the villains and the bright sunny tones of the heroes and princesses, implying that black, brown, grey colours are 'bad'.

"Looking at these (Disney villains/heroes), it's like we are telling the children darker colours are bad as why do the good people need to be all light skin then the villain darker colours it's like we are telling them they should be scared of someone with darker skin not showing equality, made me feel quite upset. It was eye opening and something I'd never really thought about before! We shouldn't be saying black is fear as all colours are beautiful. I'm going to try and be more aware when I'm reading the stories to the children as I don't want them to feel that darker skin/colours/places are something they should be scared of."

We looked at stories and the use of dark colours, as a way of representing something that was 'scary and/or some place to fear. In direct contrast, pictures of angels, in pure white – all shiny and good. The staff were really surprised that they'd never noticed or thought about the subliminal messages that were being given by this and it really brought home what very young children are exposed to and the thoughts it may create in their minds.

"I have actually recommended that book (The Colour Monster) to my sister to help her little boy with colours and I thought it was great. Now we've looked at in a different way and the implications it has, I feel so differently."



How did you put the training into practice?

First steps - As well as purchasing books, materials and objects, we are exposing the children to influential Welsh people from different racial backgrounds such as Betty Cambell, Colin Jackson, Maggie-Ogunbanwo. We also found books by a black Welsh author representing the areas around where the children live, which have been a huge hit.

We have invited our parents into the nursery for various events and the staff have taken the time to really get to know them.

They have taken an interest in the family's everyday lives and have created open lines of communication, alleviating some of the fear of asking questions about their beliefs, faith and cultures. One really simple but extremely beneficial conversation that they have had is based around the children's names, after all this is a huge part of the children's identity. Why was it chosen? Does it mean or represent anything? Exact pronunciation etc.



We are already seeing and hearing different conversations, attitudes and reactions from the children and this was recently so evident within our Preschool department. They have worked very closely with families celebrating Ramadam and Eid, and it has far exceeded any 'special days' we have celebrated before. There were no barriers to understanding what and why the celebrations were taking place. There were no grey areas or things that were not discussed, there were no topics which went un-challenged and no greater understanding ever achieved. One child even asked his mum if he could borrow her tea towel so he could use it as a prayer mat just like his friend does.

"Thank you so much for embracing our culture, it really does mean a lot. We have loved seeing Eid being celebrated so authentically in nursery, 'A' hasn't stopped telling us about being the teacher and showing his friends what we do."



How is your journey evolving?

It became very clear to us during our journey that knowledge and understanding were going to be Key to becoming an anti-racist setting. Staff need to be able to recognise racism, not only on an individual basis but on a systemic level too. We have all needed to understand 'White privilege' and what that means, in order to open our eyes to the levels of racism that some of our children, staff and families have and will encounter and recognise how we can start to change this behaviour.

We have continued to hold regular staff meetings designated only to Anti racism and all 33 staff have now completed the NDNA Embedding anti racism training.

I am also currently coming to the end of the Enhanced Leadership training through DARPL.

The more we can see, recognise and challenge, the thinking and behaviours of others – the further along this journey we will travel.

The children have responded openly and curiously to all discussions we have had and continue to grow in their own understanding and empathy.

We regularly purchase new resources to support this work and have really taken the time to source books that focus on Identities, Communities, Highlight biases and challenge the children. We have changed our 'All About Me's' to include a 'My Life' section. This has encouraged parents to discuss

their families, religions, cultures, celebrations and daily life with the staff at the earliest stages and encourages them to get involved and become part of our wider family. We talk about the language they use, Key words and phrases we could use, music that would be heard at home, the programmes which may be unfamiliar to us, along with their likes, dislikes and interests. This ensures that we can provide an environment where each child feels seen and heard as soon as they join Lullabyz.

We are still learning and still working to achieve our goals but the honest answer is that this work is ongoing and will take an extensive amount of time to become embedded. Just the other day something came up that none of us had even thought about until a parent informed us. Luckily, we have created an environment where she felt she could come to us and that gives us hope that we are heading in the right direction. Her little one attends our baby room and recently became fascinated with the farm animals and, in particular, the giant pig. Regular pictures had been sent home showing her little one enjoying nursery life whilst often holding on to his favourite pig.

One day mum asked us to discourage him from playing with the pig which confused us – Again a lack of understanding, the penny finally dropped. The family are Muslim and Islamic dietary laws consider pigs to be unclean animals. Something that we would never have thought of being an issue, again reminding us all that the more knowledge we gain, the bigger impact we can have.

The work doesn't start with the children – it definitely starts with us

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Further support

- Links to further support and resources: <https://ndna.org.uk/anti-racist-practice-in-wales/>