

Early years professionals

Four childminders who achieved Early Years Professional Status tell Mel Parks what inspired them to take up the challenge and how they juggled the demanding workload with a busy childminding life.

Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) is the graduate level professional accreditation programme for leading practitioners in the early years sector in England.

The four childminders each have a degree in different subjects and have varying levels of childcare experience and qualifications. But what they all have in common is a determination to continually improve their practice, to learn as much as they can, and ultimately to succeed at what they do.

Confidence

Sabia Hoque found that achieving EYPS gave her the confidence to set up her own childminding business after initially working alongside another childminder with EYPS who inspired her to give it a go. "Working independently, I can develop my ideas and run the business my way with the support of my childminder husband," says Sabia.

Confidence is something that all the childminders gained, as well as a deeper understanding of child development and why children do what they do. One childminder who perhaps had the furthest learning journey in terms of child development was Wendy Pedley from Scarborough,



Wendy Pedley and her minded children

who was accepted on the validation pathway without any qualifications in childcare, but a degree in a related discipline of health studies. It was while she was applying for an NVQ Level 3 that her early years worker suggested the EYPS pathway. Her work setting up a support group for childminders, to cascade the professional development training courses she attended, gave her the leadership qualities they were looking for.

Child development theories

Wendy says, "I was terrified to begin with because I didn't understand a lot of the terminology and the only two other people on the course were nursery managers. I had to do a lot of background work with child development theory – I would take myself off to the university library and stay there for the weekend.

My tutor was fantastic; when I had difficulty understanding something, she identified extra training that I could attend."

Going through the process improved Wendy's confidence no end. She says,



Sabia Hoque

Becky Henwood and her minded children



"I am a totally different childminder from the one I was 12 months ago. I'm able to see much more into what the children are doing. I've got much more knowledge of child development and learning theories."

Becky Henwood, who was a marketing analyst for a rail company before she became a childminder, realised when she looked at the EYPS that she was meeting many of the 39 standards in each age category already. It was just a case of providing evidence to demonstrate it. "As a childminder, I run my own business as well as work with children of different ages on a daily basis. I formulate my own policies, prepare my own planning and work in partnership with parents," says Becky.

When to begin

There is never a right time to start studying as Victoria Ashley found. She didn't go on to university straight after school and so seized the opportunity to gain qualifications after her first child was born and she became a childminder. It took her eight years to finish studying and achieve EYPS. During that time she had two more children. She says, "If I had waited for the perfect moment, I would never have done it. But I'm so glad I did. It was a personal achievement for me

and it felt amazing to come so far. I did think about giving it up at times, but I was determined to get it finished and I persevered. I'm proud of myself and my family is proud of me, too."

Victoria feels more reflective having gained EYPS, "It makes me think about what I can do better. I am now more confident and competent. We need highly qualified staff to give children the best start in life. I think it should be compulsory that all childminders have a level 3 qualification."

Professionals already

The childminders found that they were often mixed with nursery staff on the course. Becky says, "As a childminder, I think we sometimes forget how much experience we have and we shouldn't be nervous or afraid to work with practitioners from other settings. By running our own childminding

businesses, we are already professionals and therefore most of the EYPS work for a childminder is putting what we do on a daily basis down on paper."

There was also lots of support from tutors to help the childminders find evidence that was relevant to them, that would meet the standards. Sabia says, "When doing the EYPS, I struggled to think of changes that I had thought of and brought about as I was working with another childminder, but with suggestions from my tutor I worked on the multicultural aspect of our practice as I am Asian and live in a mainly white area."

Victoria Ashley and minded children enjoying a day out in the park



Juggling

Childminders are busy enough already without adding a six-month intensive qualification to the mix, so how did they manage to fit it all in? They all appreciated the short-term nature of the course. Wendy says, "I kept thinking, it's only six months. I managed on less sleep and got up an hour earlier to fit in more work."

Victoria says that she became super-organised and managed her time well. She gave up her social life for a while, and "Instead of sitting on the sofa watching television, I was there with my laptop. I tried to work little and often during evenings and weekends."

Extra support

Each of the childminders had support from their families and colleagues in their childminding groups

or networks. Becky says, "It was challenging fitting studying around working as a full-time childminder, but with support from fellow childminders, parents of the children I childmind, my development officer, family and local children's centre, I achieved EYPS."

Achievement

Wendy jumped up and down waving her letter in the air when she passed, then took the children out for fish and chips on the seafront followed by a ride on an open top bus. Sabia, who thought it was too difficult and academic because she had done her degree ten years ago says, "It's the hardest thing I've ever done and now I feel really clever and think all childminders should consider it. It's not just the qualification; you can lead others and learn a lot about your own practice."

Routes to EYPS

- **Sabia:** BA (Hons) English Literature and Women's Studies > NVQ Level 3 in Childcare plus work experience with an EYPS childminder > six-month validation pathway to EYPS
- **Victoria:** NVQ Level 3 in Childcare > Diploma in Home-Based Childcare > Open University (OU) Certificate in Early Years > OU Foundation Degree in Early Years > BA Degree in Early Years > BA (Hons) Early Years plus 10 years' childminding experience > six-month validation pathway to EYPS with the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)
- **Wendy:** BA (Hons) Health Studies > professional development training courses > set up a childminder support group plus eight years' childminding experience > six-month validation pathway to EYPS
- **Becky:** BA (Hons) Business Studies > Market Research Society and Chartered Institute of Marketing Diplomas > CACHE Level 3 Certificate in Childminding Practice > professional development training courses > network and accredited childminder plus seven years' experience > three-month validation pathway.



Wendy Pedley (left) receives her EYPS certificate



Sabia Hoque and her minded children

What next?

The childminders have mixed feelings about their next steps and are considering all their options. Wendy is going on to do the City and Guilds training in teaching in the lifelong learning

sector. And while they feel a huge sense of achievement, they would like their skills and knowledge to be used fully in their local areas.

Their advice to other childminders is clear – take things one step at a time. Victoria says, "If you haven't studied for a while, start with something lower." And Sabia has these words of encouragement, "If you want to be an outstanding childminder, which benefits your business at the end of the day, go for EYPS!" ●

For more information

There will be four EYPS Pathways from 2012 for undergraduates, graduates, and those already working in the sector and those who are interested in a career working in early years. For more information on funding, training providers and applying for EYPS, visit the Children's Workforce Development Council website: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk



Victoria Ashley enjoying an ice cream with her own children