

# Stories from Pen Green



Dr Margy Whalley  
Director of Research  
Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June 2011 – New Zealand

# The Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families



# Children's centres – a global 'project'

Children's centres working collaboratively with parents and the wider community have the capacity to transform children's life chances.

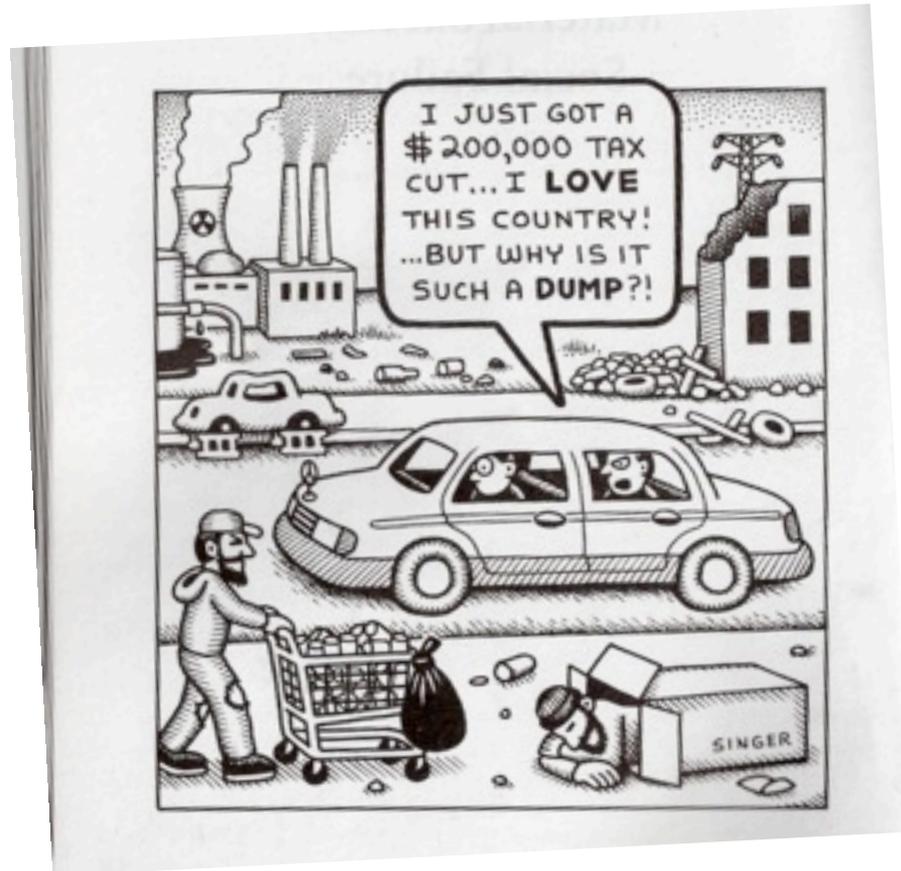
*"if there is no explicit emancipatory or empowering vision guiding the project from the onset, it will prove difficult to realise any emancipatory effects"*

BMW Boog 2003, 434

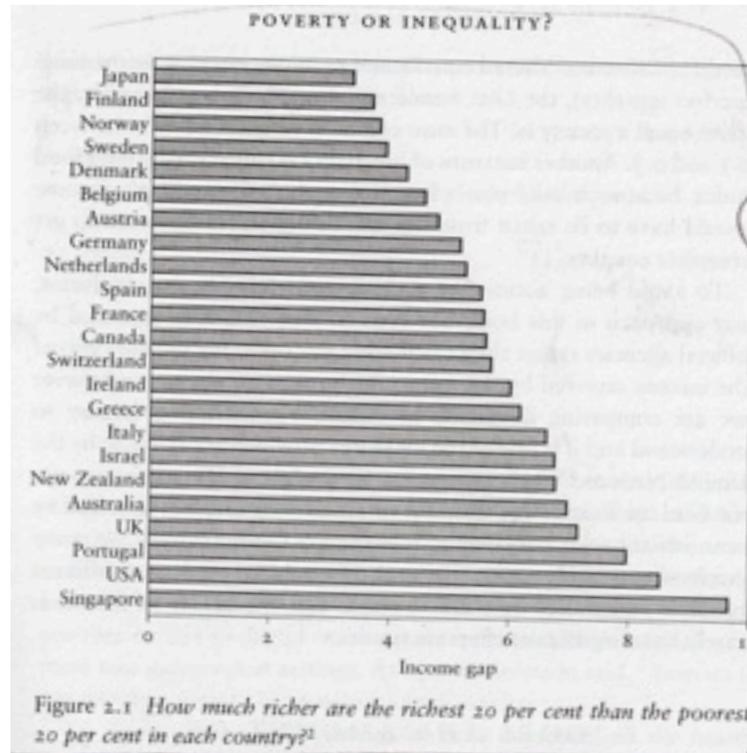
"My children's centre"

"Our children's centre"

# From 'The Spirit Level' Wilkinson and Pickett



**“Why Equality is better for  
everyone”**



“the truth is that both the broken society and the broken economy resulted from the growth inequality.” (page 5)

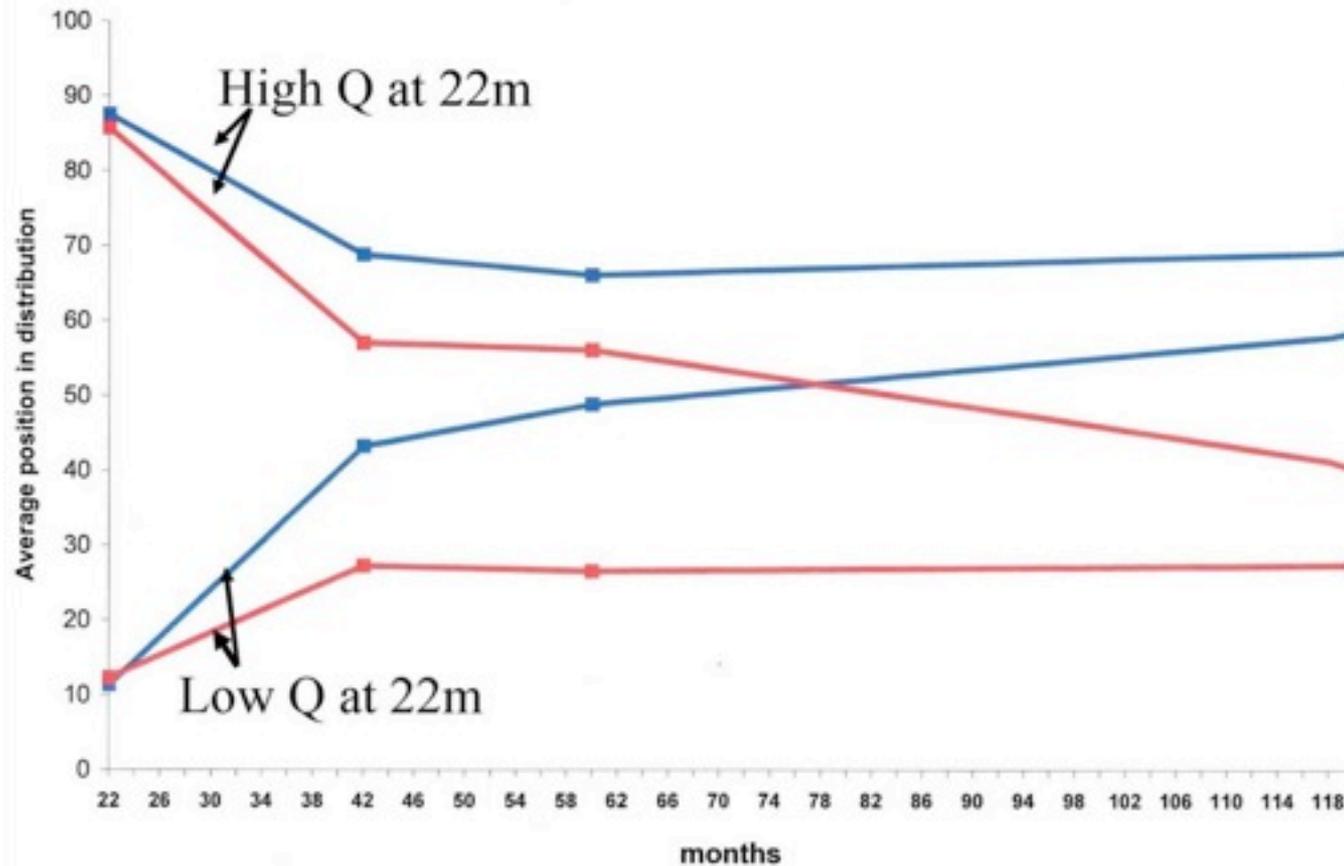
“In more unequal societies, more people are oriented towards dominance, in more egalitarian societies, more people are oriented towards inclusiveness and empathy.”

It is a remarkable paradox that, at the pinnacle of human material and technical achievement, we find ourselves anxiety-ridden, prone to depression, worried about how others see us, unsure of our friendships, driven to consume and with little or no community life. Lacking the relaxed social contact and emotional satisfaction we all need, we seek comfort in over-eating, obsessive shopping and spending, or become prey to excessive alcohol, psychoactive medicines and illegal drugs.

# Inequality = Social Division

- Disadvantaged
- Discouraged
- Confidence sapped
- Stigmatised
- Segregated
- Social anxiety

# Relative cognitive shifts, 22m to 10y



Source: Feinstein, L. (2003) 'Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort', *Economica* (70) 277, 73-97

“...our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children.”

Loris Malaguzzi

# Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families – a case study

“ In every small community there should be a service for children and their families. This service should honour the needs of young children and celebrate their existence. It should also support families, however, they are constituted within the community”

**Pen Green 1983**

“building on what has gone before”



# Corby Town

1880 population 611

1910 population 1,356

1923 Steelworks initiated – population 2,200 new families arrived

1970's population 40,000 plus

2011 population 80,000 plus



The construction of Samuel Lloyd School, now Pen Green Children's Centre, circa 1936



Corby Steelworks, 1950s

# Pen Green – a comprehensive service with intergenerational engagement

- Early years education 0-5yrs
- Extended hours, extended year provision to support families
- Inclusive, flexible, education with care for children in need and children with special educational needs
- Adult Community education and family support services
- Focus for voluntary work and community regeneration
- **Training and support for early years practitioners**
- **Research and Development**
- **Leadership Professional Development**

# A Centre with Comprehensive Provision for Young Children and their Families

1. Pen Green Nursery School Provision for children 2-5yrs
2. Pen Green Baby Nest Baby and Toddler Provision 1-3yrs
3. Nurture Group For vulnerable children from 1-3yrs
4. Creche Provision For 100+ children a week 0-5yrs
5. Childminder Network for children from 0 – 5 years
6. After school services and holiday play schemes for all local children from 4 - 11
7. Parent and Infant Support Groups including Growing Together groups, Infant and Toddler massage sessions, Groups for parents with adult mental health issues and for parents with drug or alcohol issues, extensive drop-in community groups, weekend groups for fathers, adult learning groups, groups for parents and children with disabilities



# The Problem 1

How to engage in whole system change across communities and within and across agencies?

- not being 'done to'
- user driven
- managing up
- cultural humility
- enabling governance

# The Problem 2

How to change professional practice and rebalance power relationships between citizens and professionals

- silo mentality
- power sharing
- equal and active partnerships

# The Problem 3

How to be locally responsive

“Standardization is the enemy of sustainable development”

# The Problem 4

- How to be thrifty – but not cheap!

# 'Learning to be Strong'

I'm strong;

I'm able to challenge;

I'm able to question

I'm able to choose;

I feel good about being me



1984 'Learning to be strong' A curriculum document for parents and children

**Children should feel strong**

**Children should feel in control**

**Children should feel able to question**

**Children should feel able to choose**

# The importance of a strong value base

- Parents and children both have rights
- Being a parent is a complex and difficult role
- Parenting is a key concern for both men and women
- The belief that parents are deeply committed to their children
- That early years educators and family support workers need to recognise parents' roles as their child's first and most consistent educators
- That there must be a culture of high expectations in all our early years centres and services

# Children at the Centre

The power relations between adults and children are all wrong...they must be changed so adults would no longer be convinced of their right...to arrange the life and world of the child as they think best, without considering the child's feelings about it. (Korczak)

“What values”

# Equality is better for everyone

## Inequality = Social Division

- Disadvantaged
- Discouraged
- Confidence sapped
- Stigmatised
- Segregated
- Social anxiety

# Manaus, Brazil 1979







# Lessons from indigenous peoples

- Take what people offer and build on it
- Pride matters: never humiliate; never blame
- Find reciprocal ways of working
- Look to your elders for help
- Don't accept being minoritized
- Insist on complexity
- If you're seen as 'trouble' take it as a compliment
- Seize the day and leave no-one behind

Travellers Being Choosy:  
“Hard to reach groups” groups or highly

# Challenges to our practice: Where we created obstacles/barriers to access and joined up working

- Rigid rules and boundaries – Absolutes aren't helpful e.g. the concept of 'full'
- Great untapped energies of the parents – what they can offer goes unrecognised or isn't fully taken up
- Services may be 'available' but are not easily accessible e.g. laundry
- A rather rigid and unimaginative response to the parent's adult learning needs
- Timely information sharing across agencies didn't always happen

# Traveller Advocacy

## Success for Angela Drury

**In the case of Angela Drury - v - the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs [2004] EWCA Civ 2000, Angela, her three children and several other Travellers had been encamped in April 2003 on woodland in the Northamptonshire area owned by the Forestry Commission.**

The Forestry Commission comes under the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. As is their usual practice, the Forestry Commission took possession action not only seeking possession of the woods in question but also of other woods in a very large radius around the encampment. In this case they sought possession of 30 other areas of woodland in a 20 mile radius. At Northampton District Registry the Order for all the areas of woodland was granted. We appealed against that on the basis that the Civil Procedure Rules for possession actions did not entitle possession to be granted against areas that were not trespassed upon. The matter went to the Court of Appeal and on 26th February 2004 the Court of Appeal gave their Judgement granting Angela's appeal and quashing the Order as far as it related to the 30 other areas of woodland. Mr Justice Wilson stated: "It follows that the inclusion in a Possession Order of an area of land owned by the Claimant which has not yet been occupied by the Defendant should be exceptional. Although it would be foolish to be prescriptive about the nature of the necessary evidence, it seems safe to say that it will usually take the form either of an expression of intention to decamp to the other area or of a history of movement between the two areas from which a real danger of repetition can be inferred or.....of such propinquity [proximity] and similarity between the two areas as to command the inference of a real danger of decampment from one to the other". In other words such wide orders can only be made where there is very strong evidence that the Travellers might move to those other areas and you will note that such Orders will be "exceptional".

**There was insufficient evidence that Angela and the other Travellers would move to the other areas and thus her appeal was granted.**

**Congratulations to Angela.**

We trust that the Forestry Commission and other land owners will now not normally seek to obtain such wide Possession Orders.

Issues of transferability of knowledge  
and understanding –  
Travellers are not a homogenous group

**Traveller Friendly Services**

**Traveller's not welcome**

# Unresolved Stuff

1. Evictions – huge discontinuities for health and education
2. Water – electricity – toilets
3. Transitions – cross county boundaries, across school phases
4. CPD for all staff
  - Short term – develop the concept of 'match'
  - Long term – develop a sustainable approach that's 'people proofed'
5. Additional resources for traveller children e.g. ICT, different play spaces in nursery and school that honour the needs of the child, different adult spaces and services that honour the needs of adult travellers

In children's centres professionals need to engage with parents and extended schools in different ways – it's not about more of the same it is about changes in professional practice

**“Othering”**



**Equal and  
active  
partnerships**

# Understanding the fine grain of our community

- Service champions
- Engaged stakeholders
- Self sufficient
- Multi-service users
- Single service users
- Disenfranchised users
- Restricted engagers
- Suspicious and uncomfortable
- Culturally alienated
- Uncertain or uniformed disengaged
- Disengaged and disillusioned

# 'How' is more significant than 'What'

By encouraging families to participate in the re-shaping of the shared context in which they live out their individual lives

By supporting parents and children to become effective public service users

By building the capacity of children, families and communities to secure outcomes for themselves

By harnessing the community's energy for change and parent's deep commitment to ensuring that their children have a better deal

With thanks to Demos, Scottish Government, Pen Green

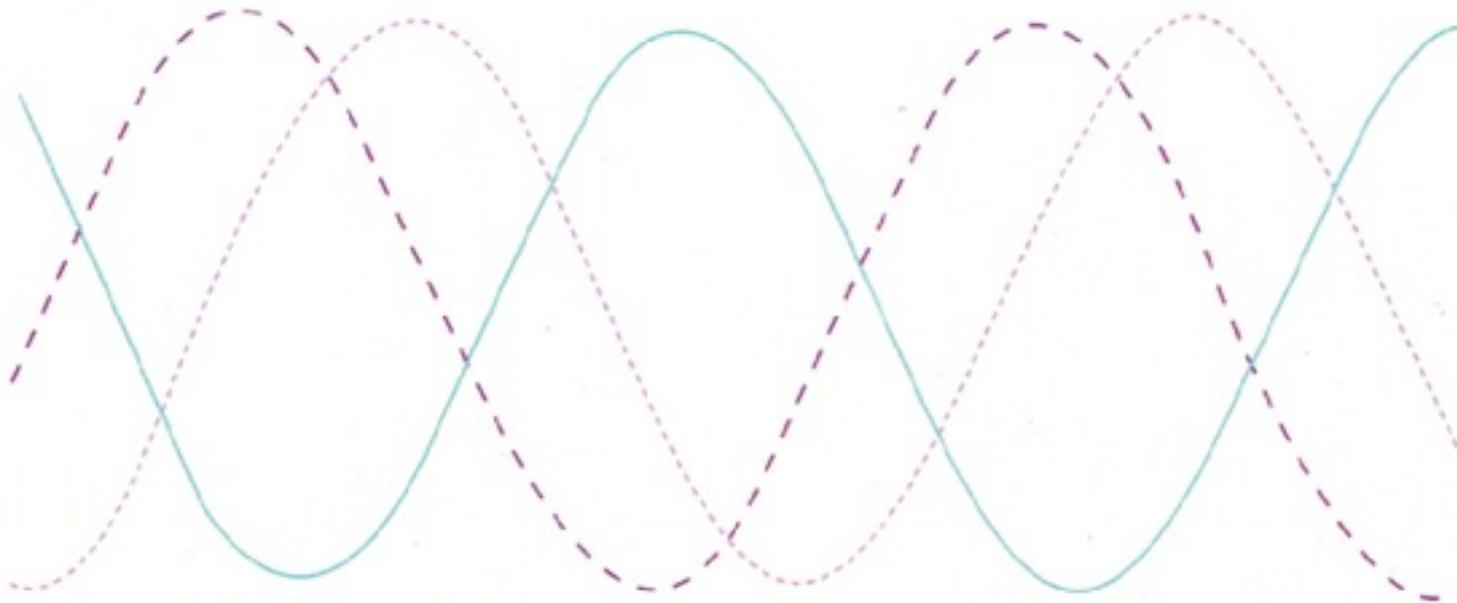
# A Community Development Approach 1983

Children's centres are concerned with children, staff, parents and the wider community –

- Developing the individuals capacity to be self directing
- Helping individuals to gain more control over their lives
- Raising self-esteem
- Promoting learning as a lifelong experience
- Working towards equal opportunities
- Pushing boundaries
- Encouraging constructive discontent - not having to put up with things the way they are
- Encouraging people to feel they have the power to change things
- Developing self-fulfillment

# A Community Development Model

Parents get involved in supporting their own child's learning and development



Parents engage in adult community education

Parents get involved in devising or delivering services for other parents

# Co-production 2011

‘Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change.’

From Boyle and Harris (2009) ‘The Challenge of Co-production’



SAY  
NO TO  
CUTS

HANDS  
OFF  
PENGREEN

SAVE  
PENGREEN

PEEN  
GREEN

PEEN GREEN  
SAVE OUR SERVICES

# Parents at Pen Green

- 1981-82** Campaign against the local Borough Council to re-roof local housing stock
- 1982-83** LAG – Local Advisory Group against the Pen Green Centre
- 1983-85** Parents conceptualising services  
Parents appointing staff  
Parents as volunteers  
Parents sharing power
- 1985-87** Parents as service providers  
Parents engaged in their own learning
- 1987-90** Parents as group leaders  
Parents as community activists

# Parents at Pen Green

**1990-97**

Parents as co-educators involved in  
their children's learning

Parents as paid workers

**1997-07**

Parents as trouble shooters

Parents as policy makers

Parents as co-researchers and evaluators

Parents as governors

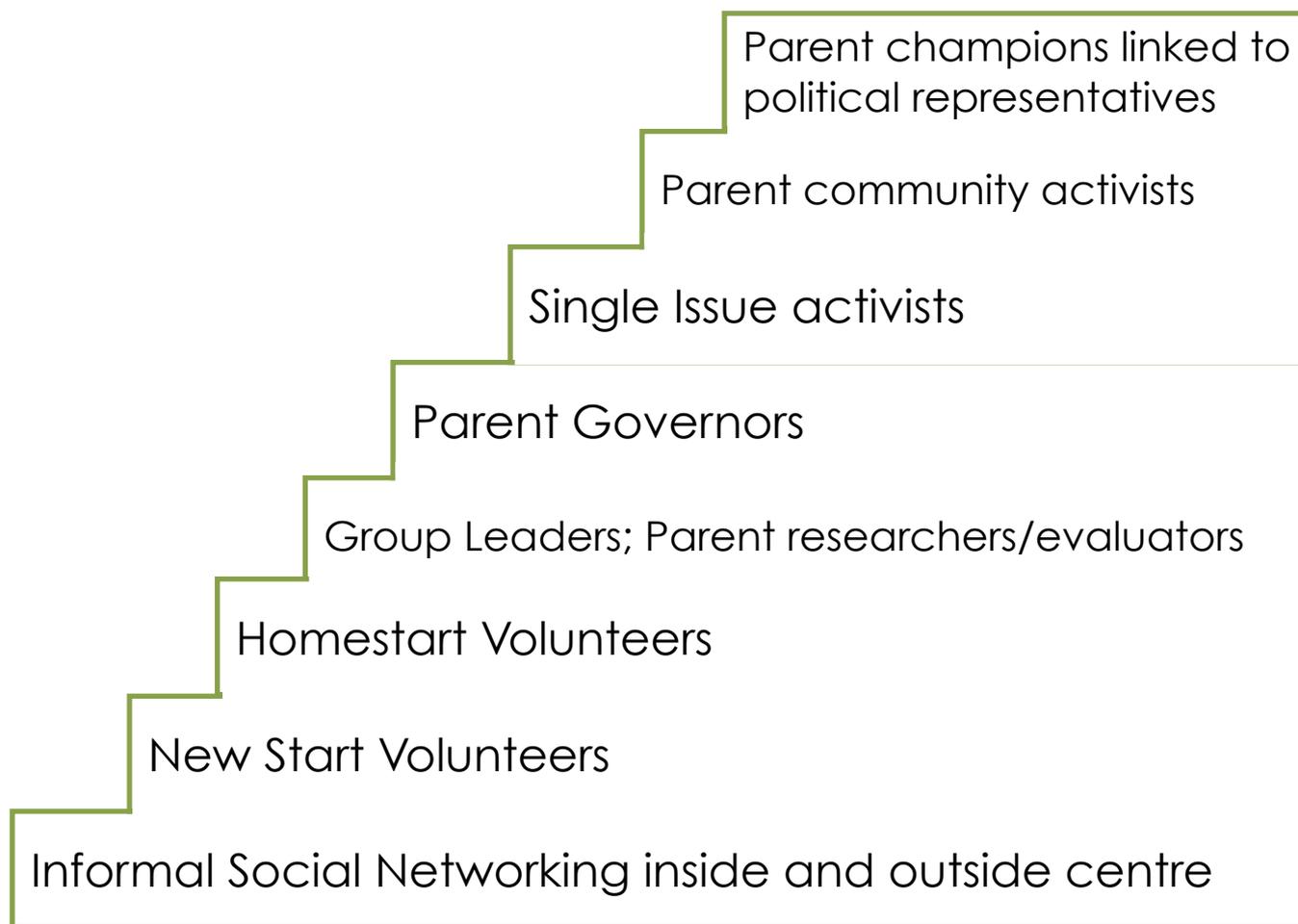
**2007 – 2011**

Parents developing innovative projects  
– Total Place Corby

Parents developing websites, Facebook, Twitter

Parents running National Campaigns

# Voluntary Engagement – ‘Big Society’



# Turning the curve on parental involvement/engagement

- A whole community strategic approach to parent involvement must be embedded in children's centres and extended schools teaching and learning strategies
- Professionals will need to challenge their own practice and traditional ways of working if they are to develop an equal and active partnership with parents
- A whole system approach means that all staff within the multidisciplinary team need to engage with the notion that parents are the solution – not the problem

# Communities Owning Local Services

‘Working together everyone and listening’ (facs)



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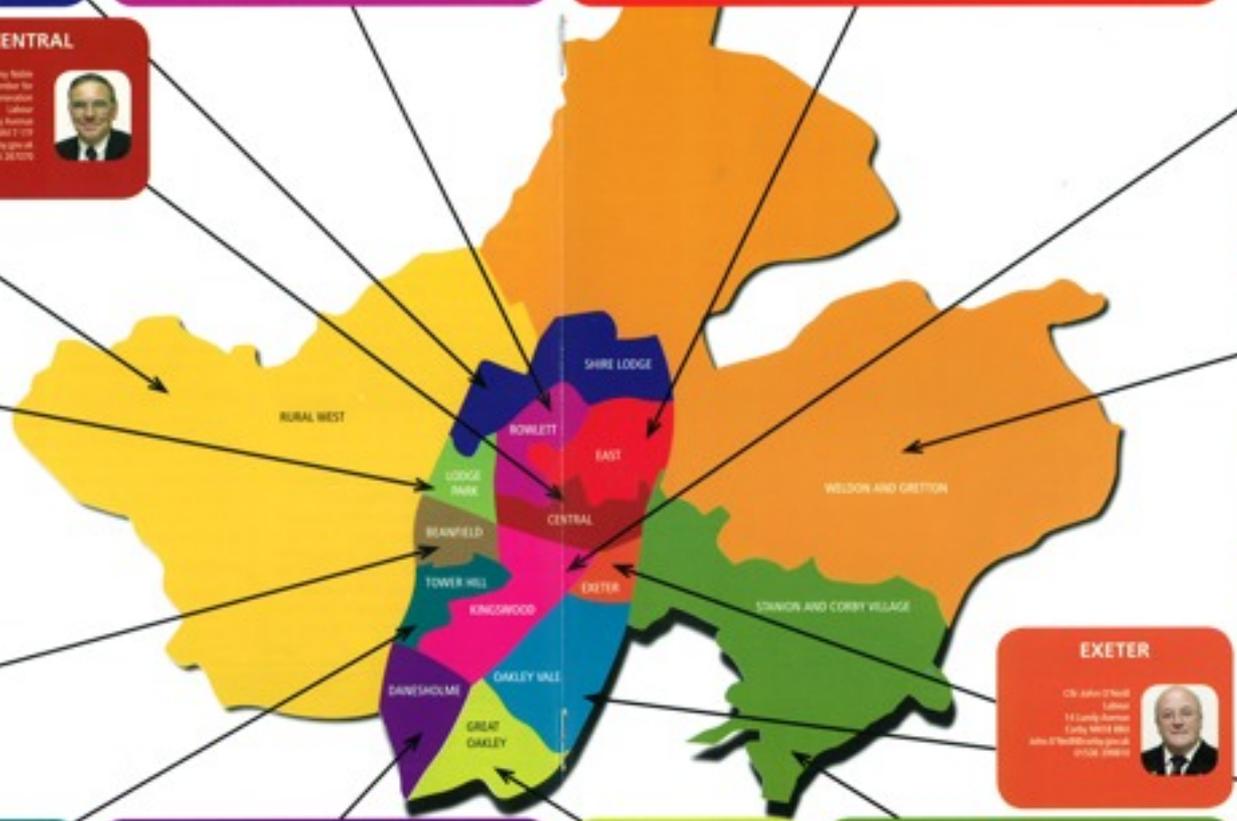


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Your local Labour Candidate



**Margy Whalley**

**Get the best for Stanion  
and the Old Village.**

**Vote Labour** Thursday 5th May 2011  
labour.org.uk



**pengreen**

Research, Development & Training Base  
& Leadership Centre

Action for Parents and children:  
Developing cultural capital  
Developing social capital

## Parental Involvement in Children's Learning

We know that young children achieve more and are happier when Early years educators work together with parents and share ideas about how to support and extend children's learning

(Athey, 1990; Meade 1995)

# Sharing Knowledge With Parents: Staff as cultural brokers/mediators

“The roles of professional experience and parents’ everyday experience are seen as complementary but equally important. The former constitutes a ‘public’ (and generalised) form of ‘theory’ about child development, whilst the latter represents a ‘personal theory’ about the development of a particular child. An interaction between the two theories or ways of explaining a child’s actions may produce an enriched understanding as a basis for both to act in relation to the child. Only through the combination of both types of information could a broad and accurate picture be built up of a child’s developmental progress.”

(Easen et al, 1992)

# Parents as Advocates

“Nothing gets under a parents skin more quickly and more permanently than the illumination of his or her own children’s behaviour. The effects of participation can be profound.”

(Athey, 1990, p66)

# Need to recognise and respect parents as co-educators

In a future model, children's centres might pioneer a shift from a conventional model of teaching and learning to a new model where parents and staff work together as co-educators. The conventional model of teaching still privileges the professional as the expert. Children's centres have shown their skill in engaging parents: now they need to develop a model of parental engagement which requires professionals to share responsibility with parents for their children's learning.

# Our Tracer Study

- Source Bernard Van Leer Tracer studies
- Small scale
- Qualitative
- Methods accessible to all concerned
- Trying to elicit the ‘story behind the story’
- Concerned with ‘added value’ and community and personal outcomes, soft & deep outcomes
- Can inform and transform practice

## Where Natasha is now .... (Aged 15)

I go to Lodge Park, starting my second year of G.C.S.E's. I take Maths, English, Triple Science, R.E., I.C.T., Sports Studies and Technology. I have already taken some Maths, English and Science exams and got A\* in all except English where I got an A. I am thinking of taking Media as an A Level.

I do gymnastics in my spare time and have been accepted into the county squad. My best competition was the level 3 regionals last year (2005) where I came second on vault, 1st on beam and second overall. I also enjoy a lot of sports such as swimming and basketball. I play for the schools basketball team.

I am predicted A's and A\* for my GCSE's.

I like to use the computer at home. I use Facebook to talk to friends from my old school.

I also coach gymnastics twice a week at Studfall Infant School, year 1's and 2's and on a Saturday morning at the sports centre (children aged 5-10)

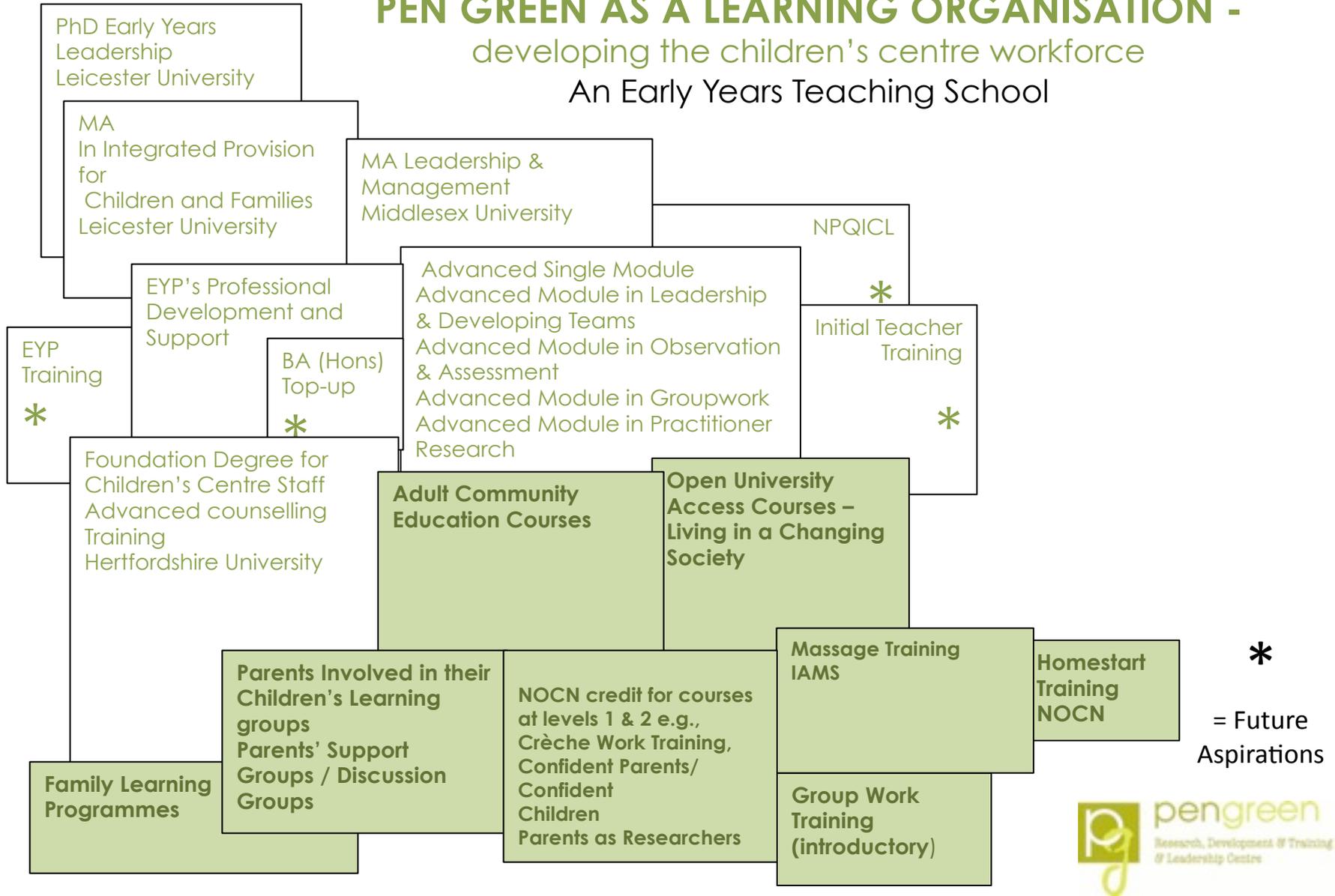


# Children's centres and integrated settings and services engage effectively with parents:

- When staff are highly qualified and have a strong theoretical base
- When staff are well supported, in provision that is well resourced and securely funded
- When staff adopt an 'equal and active' approach
- When staff have cultural humility
- When staff are capable of cultural brokerage/mediation

# 'University of the Workplace'

## **PEN GREEN AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION -** developing the children's centre workforce An Early Years Teaching School



# Developing the Future Workforce

## Community Education Opportunities at Pen Green

- GCSE English or equivalent
- GCSE Maths or equivalent
- Introduction to Computing
- Computer Literacy and IT (CLAIT)
- Sign Language City and Guilds Stage 1
- Creative Connections – overcome the barrier to writing
- Family Literacy/Numeracy
- Communication Skills
- Creche Workers Course (NOCN)
- Homestart (NOCN)
- NVQ in Early Years and Education L2 and L3/NVQ Playworkers (now CACHE Diploma)
- Counselling Skills Course
- Between Ourselves
- Confident Parents/Confident Children (NOCN)
- Introducing Childminding Practice
- Making Choices
- Sewing/Crafts Group
- Protective Behaviours
- Stress and Relaxation
- Skills for Work/Confidence Building Course
- Baby Massage (IAIM Certificate)
- Involving Parents in their Children's Learning NOCN
- Parents as Researchers NOCN

# What Future?

“Children’s centres have the potential to do more and do it better”

Children’s centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Document  
Pen Green/Innovation Unit 2010

A future model could be different. The starting point could be that of local people co-constructing the design for their own children's centre. There would still be a need for qualified staff, and for professional services. The shift would be that in every centre local people would be supported to do more for themselves and would become far more discerning consumers of public services over which they have far greater control.

The key will be to redesign services to enable more mutual self-help, so that people identify their own solutions. Children's centres could become firmly rooted in their communities and one of their purposes would be to create and sustain strong, supportive relationships for people to draw on.

Children's centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Document

Pen Green/Innovation Unit 201 – page 9

In the future a change could be signaled by a change of name. Children's centres could be renamed as Centres for Children and Families. Such a change would indicate an increased focus on supporting **families** to support their children. Within ten years it would be widely accepted that it takes committed parents and a Centre for Children's and Families, rather than a village, to bring up a child. Staff in the new Centres for Children and Families will need to deepen their engagement with families.

Children's centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Document

Pen Green/Innovation Unit 201 – page 10

In a future model, the importance of creating more social capital would be central to developing strong families that are able to give children the best foundation. Parents can get to know each other before the birth of their babies and make friends in the way the National Childbirth Trust does for those parents who can access their classes.

Births could be registered at children's centres, child benefit channeled through them, and they could be used far more as contact centres for separated or divorced parents. Weekend and evening access for working parents and fathers in particular could be managed well trained volunteers supported by staff. Facebook, blue tooth technology, mobile phones and email could be far more imaginatively and creatively deployed to communicate with parents and between them.

Children's centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Document

Pen Green/Innovation Unit 201 – page 18

A radical shift in future professional practice would mean that parents' role as their child's first and most consistent educator was given much greater prominence and acknowledgement. Children's centres would make greater use of video, shared assessment and other technology so that parents can record learning at home and share this with staff so that they can adapt the curriculum to re-enforce and extend this learning.

Children's centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Document

Pen Green/Innovation Unit 201 – page 31

Future models of governance will increasingly consider mutualism if local families are to be significantly engaged in conceptualizing, co-delivering and co-evaluating services. Children's centres will provide a fertile area to pilot community dividend schemes whereby volunteers and the whole children's centre is incentivised to reduce costs and improve outcomes by allowing the centre to share in any savings achieved by such measures.

Children's centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Document

Pen Green/Innovation Unit 201 – page 32

With increased levels of local autonomy future centres will be able to promote higher levels of engagement and participation by families. The principle of reciprocity whereby volunteers learn and train in return for working in the centre would become the norm.

New volunteerism conventions will distinguish between roles of paid and unpaid staff and indeed question some of these boundaries with a view to changing them where the use of volunteers might lead to more effective outcomes and greater impact. The currently overlooked and under utilised energy and commitment of retired professionals will be an important asset.

Children's centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Document

Pen Green/Innovation Unit 201 – page 34

# Understand the importance of adopting a Systemic Approach to Children's Centre Development

- CCs are part of a **community system**, and so pro-active engagement with the community, its local authority, agencies, educational and social centres, is critical. **No Children's Centre is an island.**
- CCs must be user-centric, they are there to serve disadvantaged families in their community setting,s and so users must have a clear and strong voice in the role, activities and operation of the centre.
- To engage with the child we must engage with the parent and the **family system**. Parents' feedback must guide the collaborative future of the centre.
- The Professionals at the centre must recognise that they, too, are part of **a complex social and educational system** comprising the centre and its wider community. This has ramifications on staff training, continuous professional development, attitudes and behaviour.

# A Systemic Approach to Children's Centre Development (continued)

- Leaders of children's centres, must have in their job descriptions the leadership of change, because change there must be if we are to engage the 20%
- In their day to day functions, CCs must be open to the wider **children's services system** and recognise the value that other organisations and disciplines can bring, such as, adult educationalists, paediatricians, health practitioners, social workers, nursery nurses, midwives, psychotherapists, mental health workers, and professional managers in business, financial control, and project management. In short, collaboration and innovation must become natural, and be managed effectively.

M Whalley & R Bose 2009

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