

WHAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE

A cross section of pupils in Year 5 & 6 in Barnet were involved in an innovative PSHE and Citizenship activity in June /July 2006 to help gain their views about the range of people who work with children, young people and their families/carers, and to establish a comprehensive list of those who constitute the children's workforce.

The activity enabled the pupils to gain a better understanding of the varied roles of the children's workforce across the services and helped by identifying additional roles within the children's workforce to help create a comprehensive list. They also identified some of the skills required by the children's workforce to do their jobs effectively.

WHO'S IN THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE

Responses from the pupils highlighted the importance of all the work roles across the children's service. Although the pupils sometimes singled out school cleaners, administrative workers and lollipop workers as their most important roles in the children's workforce the most frequently mentioned roles were the police (326), foster carers (323), teachers (299) GPs/doctors (227), dentists/orthodontists (231) and social workers (218).

Doctors/GPs and the police were selected as the two most important professionals working with children and young people because their jobs entail keeping children safe and healthy. A selection of quotes below explain their reasons for the top rankings:

"The police help keep some people off the streets so we can be safe when we are going home, so we can go to the park and play etc. As well as all that, they act like your friends when you see them on the street"

"They help the child to stop getting diseases and illnesses by injecting them. If there were no doctor in the world, people and children would be dying and suffering. The doctor cares for people and the family, also children"

"The police is the most important because if children's parents hit them very hard they give advice and help"

"Foster worker has the hardest job because they hardly know anything about the children and they have to make sure that the children are okay because they must have been through a hard time."

"Parents and carers because they look after us to make sure we are safe, provide us with clothes, food, money, they love us and wouldn't trade us for another child"

"because if we had no teacher we would get no education or we would not get a job"

"social workers because they look after you and your family and they can make them have a very happy life! If there is a problem with your family they can sort it out"

Additional group of children's workers identified by the pupils include:

Sports coaches	Firemen
Lifeguards	Clowns
Vets	Face painters
Dance teachers	Priests & Vicars
Activity leaders	Personal tutors (including Kumon tutors)
House help (au pairs/babysitters)	Rescue & search teams
Art Therapists	Public train/bus drivers
Security guards	Emergency services
Childline Counsellors	

ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR THE CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE

The pupils were very clear that the children's workforce will need to be professional and have the relevant qualifications and expertise to do their jobs effectively. In addition, they mentioned some soft skills and personal attributes such as having a good sense of humour, being patient, friendly, kind and

calm. More significantly the pupils touched on the six Common Core of Skills and Knowledge, communication, multi-agency working, supporting transitions, safeguarding and sharing information. Here are some underlying quotes relating to the skills:

“Patience and listening skills and has to be friendly. They have to like children and be trustworthy because a child might tell them a secret’

“these people need all the skills real parents have like being able to cook, clean, work, tidy, be there for the child, be strict but fair, be nice, don't spoil the child and not to cause physical or verbal abuse etc”

“to use the right sort of language around children to be kind to also know first aid”

“They need patience, skill and kindness. They also need to have qualifications to have these jobs”.

It is apparent that being safe and healthy and achieving economic well-being is very important to the pupils. The police, GPs & doctors were mentioned as the most important children’s workforce because their jobs were perceived as helping to keep children healthy and protecting children from harm. It was interesting that parents and family were sometimes ranked as the most important children’s workforce because of their role in helping to achieve economic well-being and also keeping pupils safe. The pupils also highlighted the critical role of foster carers, social workers and also teachers, thereby drawing important links between educational achievement, well-being and protection from harm as well as the benefits of working across organisational and professional boundaries.

The varied rankings of the workforce at the top spot highlights the importance of joint working across the children’s service and involving service users in the children’s workforce development strategy.

THE TEN MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS

The ten most important skills listed by the pupils for the children’s workforce to work effectively include: patience, kindness, qualifications (competence), understanding, caring, calm, listening skills, politeness, communication and friendliness. Here are some additional underlying quotes relating to the skills:

“They should be willing to work with others even if others are depressed or angry. They have to love their jobs and be very tolerant.”

“they have to have a big heart, like what the kids like, be able to cook, have a big imagination and not get mad easy.”

“They need skills to do it consistently and never give up on you no matter how bad you have been”

“They would need patience, they would need some training on kids, they also will need some of their brain and the reason I say that is because they might need to go back and think of what they did when they were kids and they cannot be shy.”

“they must wake up on the right side of the bed” before they interact with children.”

“they have to understand us in a different way. We want someone that cares.”

“the skills they need to learn the most is try and keep children happy because if you make them angry or upset, they will retaliate in a bad way.”

This summary is made available to the children and young people’s workforce during training and other events across the partnership in Barnet. Summarised findings are woven into all the relevant training for the children and young people’s workforce. For further information contact Children’s Workforce Development Team – childrens.workforce@barnet.gov.uk.

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