



# **Schools Out West Dorset Ltd – a Community Partnership**



**Fast Track Report**

**December 09**

**Dorset**

## 1. Summary

4Children is pleased to present this final report to Dorset County Council summarising the Fast Track support funded by the DCSF to develop strategic and practical solutions for growing and sustaining childcare services in rural areas.

In partnership with Dorset Sure Start Extended Services team, 4Children delivered a rural childcare workshop in West Dorset in November 2007. The outcome was the development of a pilot that would explore the potential for a federated model of childcare delivery with a school cluster. The main aim was to develop an effective partnership model that would enable schools to work together to meet identified childcare needs, and that could be replicated elsewhere.

Expressions of interest were invited from providers (in Dorset and neighbouring counties) who would be willing to develop the childcare in a specific area or even expand their current services but no responses were received.

A community meeting was held in April 2008 in Beaminster, West Dorset, the area identified for the pilot and following that meeting, a board was established to oversee the development and delivery of the new childcare provision that is now officially a limited company – Schools Out West Dorset Ltd. An application has been made for charity registration also.

With a successful funding application made to Dorset Sure Start in January 09 the childcare setting opened in September 2009 and the four schools as board members are jointly managing the provision as part of their commitment to the Community Partnership.

The out of school childcare is now available both term-time and in the holidays for 24 children from four schools. Dorset has commissioned an external evaluation to build on the Fast Track work and to ensure that a robust model is in place with potential for replication in other parts of the county.

The County Council has funded a minibus for the Beaminster schools pyramid that is based and maintained by St Mary's (the School's Out host school) and is available for the collection service from Salway Ash, Broadwindsor and Parret & Axe primary schools to School's Out in term –time and for trips in the holiday periods.

The staff team recruited between May and September 09 consists of a Manager, Deputy Manager and three Playworkers as well as a driver.

## **2. Background**

The Childcare Act 2006 outlines the statutory requirement for local authorities to secure sufficient childcare for children aged 0-14 years of age (up to 19 with a disability) for priority groups of parents/carers such as those in work. As part of the extended services core offer, primary schools are expected to ensure access to childcare that matches the working day, 8am to 6pm for 48 weeks of the year; for secondary schools the expectation is to provide access to a range of activities and a safe place to be during term time and more flexibly during the school holidays.

Working closely with the TDA and ContinYou, 4Children is funded by DCSF to support local authorities to remove any barriers to childcare and a safe place to be for secondary school pupils, and reach the targets for extended services to be accessible from all schools by 2010, through the Fast Track programme.

Dorset's Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2008 stated:

"There is an identified need for an increase in the number of holiday play schemes especially for working parents. Respondents to the Parental Survey have clearly indicated that their future childcare needs will include after school and holiday play schemes more than any other type of childcare".

Dorset Sure Start Extended Services had already identified the need for childcare to be provided within the Beaminster (West Dorset) cluster of schools and the decision was taken to proceed with a pilot as part of the Fast Track support.

## **3. Aims and objectives of the 4Children Fast Track project**

The aim of the Fast Track consultancy was to develop and share:

- Good practice and practical solutions for developing and sustaining childcare services in rural areas
- Support local problem solving and relationship building to develop and sustain solutions
- Demonstrate an increase in rural schools offering services

Project objectives included:

1. To develop an appropriate model for the development of childcare in rural areas
2. Develop and agree an action plan with measurable objectives
3. Provide support for Dorset, its clusters of schools and their partners
4. Identify what has worked well/what is not working

5. Provide a case study for all local authorities on Dorset models of rural childcare provision
6. Link the lessons learned with wider policy implications regarding childcare, rural services and extended services in and around schools

## **4. Method**

Following the rural workshop that took place in November 08, 4Children met with representatives of the Dorset Sure Start Advisers for West and East Dorset and the overall lead to decide on a series of actions that would need to take place to engage the Beaminster cluster and take the work forward. An action plan was drawn up and agreed by all present.

It was agreed that 20 days would be allocated to the project (5 were added in December 2008 and a further 15 in March 09). The involvement of Dorset in the initial rural pilot that took place with Northumberland, Cumbria and Lincolnshire authorities in 2007 had positioned it well, with some early exploration into what other authorities were doing and some of the solutions being rolled out for rural areas .

## **5. The Context**

There are 6 district or borough councils, the County Council and two unitary authorities (Bournemouth and Poole) in Dorset.

### **Key facts about Dorset:**

- Dorset is an average sized county in terms of area but the smallest county in England in terms of population
- It has the highest elderly population out of all of the shire counties
- Correspondingly it has one of the smallest proportion of school age children and lowest of pre-school children
- The birth rate is lower than the death rate, giving a decline in the population. The fact that people are moving into the county maintains an overall growth, 6.7% in the last 10 years, and this is predicted to continue to grow
- The average house price is the highest in the UK outside London and the South East whilst earnings are amongst the lowest
- Unemployment is low
- Employment is predominantly in the service sector and agriculture

Some of the main concerns flagged up by the Sure Start Extended Services team were around the rural challenges to developing sustainable childcare and the barriers thrown up by schools. These include:

- The size of schools is often a barrier – in West Dorset there are 16 primary schools in rural areas. Half of these have less than 100 children on roll and only 4 have 150. Given these low numbers the possibility of any out of school provision delivered by schools in isolation and being sustainable is low from the outset
- Given the profile of the population there is often low interest in children attending out of school provision. In many schools there is an identified need which is sufficient to need action but insufficient to be sustainable
- The distance between most schools is considerable. The area is made up of narrow, winding country lanes and the time taken to travel between schools can be over 30 minutes. This can result in making opportunities for schools to work in clusters very challenging
- Generally pupil rolls across Dorset are falling. Schools with small rolls feel threatened by the possibility of closure and are protective of their numbers. The result can be reluctance from many Governing Bodies to work closely with other schools. There is a fear that if children are collected from another school parents may choose to move their child to that school
- Where travel between schools is possible by distance and co-operation, there is no transport system in place
- With the exception of the Bridport town area, there is a lack of childcare providers and there is no out of school provision in the rural area of West Dorset serving 16 primary schools. There are a few isolated pre-schools serving 2 to 5 year olds – most of these open only for morning sessions, some for less than five sessions a week and at best these providers only open for the school day
- Most of the childcare in the area is managed by voluntary committees and registered charities – with increasing demands made on such committees, many providers struggle to recruit board members.

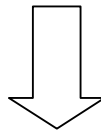
In a recent report “Peace and quiet disadvantage: insights from users and providers of children’s centres in rural communities” published in November 09 by the Commission for Rural Communities some of the prevailing issues are cited as evening and weekend support and services as well as transport, including needs better links and subsidised fares for families that need them.

## 6. Developing the pilot

There were a number of elements that were key to the development process for School's Out and these are outlined in more detail below. Although they have been assimilated into an order, many activities such as applying for funding, transport and company registration all progressed as parallel activities:

- School & Community Engagement
- Establishing the working group
- Agreeing project activity and a timeline
- Consultation with families
- Funding application
- Transport
- The company and OfSTED registration
- Employment
- Marketing
- Policies, procedures and systems
- Launch
- Rolling out the model
- Evaluation

### School & Community Engagement



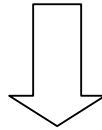
Following the initial meeting and some research into the Beaminster area, a meeting was held in April 2008 in the town centre. Those attending were Head teachers and Governors (some of who had attended the initial training in November 07) from the following four schools; St Mary's C of E Primary, Salway Ash Primary, Parret & Axe Primary and Broadwindsor Primary. The local Pre-Schools from Beaminster and Mosterton came as well as local childminders. A presentation gave some context on Extended Services and the benefits for children, families and communities. It also provided an overview of a community partnership – a model of a company limited by guarantee that was proposed as a potential vehicle to overcome some of the challenges with an opportunity for questions and discussion.

The idea, although welcomed by some, met with opposition. In the main it was the perceived belief that the authority was forcing the agenda upon them and that

without extra resources this would be too difficult to achieve. There was a real concern from Governors about the extra responsibility for Head Teachers.

The Dorset Sure Start Extended Services Adviser for West Dorset used the event as an opportunity to book meetings with all schools present to follow up any queries, provide more information on the pilot and in general gain some feedback post-event. In spite of a fairly negative initial reception to the idea, most in attendance agreed that they would be prepared to attend a further meeting to take the project forward.

### **Establishing the working group**



The first meeting to follow the Beaminster event took place in July 2008 and was attended by all three of the four Head teachers and good representation from governors of two schools. A paper was tabled on the Community Partnership model approach.

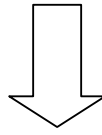
The initial aim of the meeting was to recap on our joint purpose:

- We have an unmet need for out of school provision
- The Childcare Sufficiency Duty
- Extended Schools target
- Need to work together to solve – not alone
- Challenges ahead – face together
- Opening out of school provision can benefit us all
- Extra resource available via Fast Track – make the most of it!

Other main topics that were covered included a question and answer session on how the Community Partnership would work and what needed to happen in practice (most importantly delegating responsibility). The meeting focused on the consultation with families (to confirm feasibility of the childcare), the location for the eventual childcare, transport issues, funding, staff and developing a timeline.

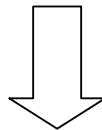
An initial board structure was agreed as two governors from each school and representatives from both pre-schools. It is intended that board membership could be wider in the future to include the Bridport Children's Centre for example.

### **Agreeing activity and timeline**



A timeline was developed to provide the group with a clear pathway, not only of what actions needed to be undertaken but also by when.

### **Consultation with families**

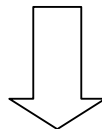


Dorset Sure Start Extended Services led the family consultation with the four schools using a questionnaire but also by offering drop- in sessions at the schools. Issues around Working Tax Credits were raised and it was felt that support needed to be as accessible as possible so information was made available for all schools. Consultation with the children on the provision and what activities they would like to do will be undertaken as part of the marketing stage.

It was agreed that the age range would be 4-11 but that this could be extended in the future. Everyone agreed that a holiday club/safe place to be (for older children) were all possible future provision/links with the partnership.

Dorset Sure Start agreed to analyse the results of the consultation and these results were used for the grant application.

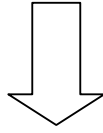
### **Funding application**



Members of the group agreed to undertake the Identification of Need (ION) and the overall Grant application. The first stage was relatively simple (ION) however it was felt that the full application would require additional support. This was made available from the Dorset Sure Start Business Support Team.

Dorset Sure Start funding was approved in February 2009 - £18,584 for revenue funding, that being the amount applied for. The £27,220 capital application was still being considered - £16,800 was agreed with a further opportunity for the board to apply for additional capital following consultation with the children at a later stage.

## Transport



In April 2008 the Sure Start Extended Services Adviser carried out a travel distance and time study that provided the group with a clear summary of the distance between schools and the time it takes to travel between them. In addition research was undertaken into the transport options available on all routes. This included taxis and buses and the number of seats available for each option.

The group considered the options and some felt that school transport was an option but could result in some children spending long periods of time on a bus. The leasing of a minibus was also favoured but the group needed to decide over what period – 1 year or 3 years? Overall cost needed to be calculated with driver and fuel costs on top as well as staff costs (passenger assistant). A volunteer driver was also considered as an option.

In January 2009 the Extended Services lead for the authority agreed to support a minibus proposal for the school pyramid in the area and this was led by the Head teacher of St Mary's. The grant application for the 17-seater mini bus was supported by board members and it was agreed it would be a shared resource.

The proposal was accepted in June 09. It was agreed that St Mary's would own the bus and a rota will be operated between the pyramid schools for use, this includes the pre-schools. It will be available every day, during term time, for Schools Out.

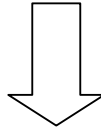
It was also agreed that transport costs would be absorbed by the cost per session equally to keep things simpler. Charges will be £6.00 to 5pm and £8.00 to 6pm. This is comparable with other rural childcare provision and should absorb running costs. It was pointed out that it is likely that the provision may make a loss in the first year or at best break even. However if all 24 children were to attend a surplus may be possible. Discounted family tickets for places were also discussed at this stage but it was decided that the group would review this depending on need. In November a family discount or 50% for the third child was agreed (in response to the first request) – to be reviewed in 2010.

The group recognised that families in need of financial assistance should be considered carefully and information on the childcare element of Working Tax Credit made available with applications, supported where possible by staff in the setting. There is also a Dorset funded initiative called "Count me in" for children with additional needs and the board are unanimous in their goal of providing fully inclusive provision.

The appointed manager is responsible for planning transport logistics (route/timings etc) with support and advice from the board/advisors. It was also agreed that the

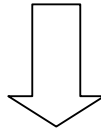
“waiting time” that will occur on the pick-up route must be carefully managed to ensure a positive experience for the children. This does mean that each school (except St Mary’s) will be advised that they need to arrange supervision for the children whilst they are waiting to be collected. Playworkers operate a rota to cover the “Passenger Assistant” role on the transport.

### **Setting up the company and OfSTED registration**



Papers to establish the company were filed with Companies House in January 2009 and the Certificate of Incorporation for Schools Out West Dorset Ltd was received in March 09. A short training session was held for Officers in March on the roles and responsibilities of company directors – it is planned that this will also be made available to the wider board. The company is now registered with OfSTED.

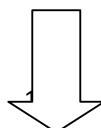
### **Employment**



A board member with his own design company offered to take responsibility for the staff advertisement and this was approved by the board and sent to the Dorset Echo, Dorset Advertiser, Bridport News and the Western Gazette. It also went into Dorset Sure Start’s recruitment bulletin and school newsletters.

A timescale was agreed from advert to recruitment and interviews took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2009. The interview panel comprised board members from the schools with Dorset Sure Start and the Head Teacher from St Mary’s (host school) as advisers. An employment pack was compiled containing details of salaries (on a pro-rata basis), application forms, a summary of Schools Out West Dorset Ltd and Job Descriptions. A three- month induction programme (Appendix 1) is also being designed, and to support the whole employment process the Sure Start Extended Services Adviser took the Chair, Vice Chair and one other board member on a series of visits to high quality out of school provision in the county to help with ideas on developing this type of provision.

### **Marketing the provision**



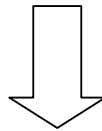
The four partnership schools and Pre-Schools used parent events to provide information on School's Out and all schools will run articles in their May newsletters (after ½ term).

A logo for Schools Out West Dorset Ltd was developed and a brochure/booking form about the provision that includes all the other options for childcare in the area was also designed. This was undertaken on a voluntary basis by a board member.

The Manager visited Children's Centres with flyers and attended also a Childminders meeting in September.

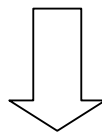
A School's Out sign was designed for the school and is displayed alongside that for Beaminster Pre-School. This is in addition to a uniform and a bold logo on the minibus (Appendix 2)!

### **Policies and procedures, systems etc**



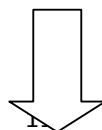
4Children supplied their "Getting it Right" policy pack for out-of-school childcare to the group and a sub-group will take the lead on tailoring the policies to Schools Out along with the manager. A Conflict of Interest Policy was developed by 4Children for the Board as required by Charity Law (Appendix 3).

### **Launch childcare**



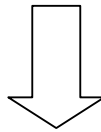
Schools Out West Dorset Ltd opened the out of school childcare in September 2009. Plans to open in the preceding summer holidays were prevented by maintenance work happening at the two schools who could have hosted. An open day was held on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> September with an opportunity to register made available as well as for children to try out all activities – including the outdoor pool!

### **Rolling out the model**



Both this report and the evaluation will be useful guidance for other areas of the county in rolling out the model and can also be disseminated country-wide. To support dissemination training was delivered to approximately 18 school governors and head teachers in both West and North Dorset in July 09 (Appendix 4) and focused primarily on the barriers to providing access to childcare. The Dorset Sure Start Extended Services team intends to use this model to develop rural childcare access for the future.

## Evaluation



The project evaluation commissioned by Dorset Sure Start Extended Services will look at the distance travelled in this Fast Track project between November 07 to December 09. It will consider what went well and where improvements could be made to the process using a series of interviews with those that have participated as well as desk top research. In addition Dorset Sure Start has also commissioned 4Children to design an evaluation tool that can be used for a variety of Extended Services projects that will focus on:

- Initial project objectives
- Required outcomes and owners
- What will success look like in 3/6/12 months?
- Ways to measure progress
- Key milestones and indicators
- A range of hard and soft outcomes

### **What can get in the way**

The process to establish School's Out took approximately eighteen months and there are a number of challenges that were faced that for future projects could be avoided.

- 1) Cultural issues – those involved in making the decisions within a community are often not those with greatest need and can therefore be obstructive to the process – consultation from the outset with a broad range of stakeholders is essential
- 2) Transport is the biggest challenge. Had it not been for the local authority investment in a minibus the process may have taken longer or been more expensive (despite extensive research into existing transport options)
- 3) Insuring vehicles for this purpose is not easy – especially as Dorset County Council insurance only applied to DCC employees and Schools Out is a separate company. This caused problems with insurers when a minibus had

- to be leased whilst waiting for the delayed delivery of the purchased minibus (the supplier went into liquidation!)
- 4) Recruitment of staff took time and there were few applicants. The Vice Chair worked tirelessly to engage existing school staff in the opportunity and the first driver recruited dropped out because of the hours being so limited. Also the complications which can arise with staff/child ratios on site when one Playworker is providing passenger support on the pick-up must be considered
  - 5) Policies & procedures must have input from the whole Board – this can be time-consuming although a set of model policies as templates was invaluable
  - 6) The host school had considerably more tasks to undertake and although by November Board responsibility was more even – this was not always the case
  - 7) Written communication was not always read (minutes/emails etc) by everyone which caused problems at meetings and with keeping everyone up to date
  - 8) Volunteers have made this happen. The whole process has relied heavily on people contributing unpaid time – not always an effective business model

### **Success factors**

- The commitment and drive of a local authority Sure Start Extended Services Adviser
- Childcare Champions from governing bodies –specific individuals became advocates
- The Pre-Schools – their knowledge about childcare, OfSTED, companies and charitable status was invaluable
- Schools – again Head teachers and other staff that came on board to support the process
- Other local authority support – e.g. business development
- The community wanting the best for their children and realising that the Community Partnership was for them
- Expertise in governance – specifically establishing the company limited by guarantee model and charity registration
- Support from the host school to share its space and provide a storage area
- Local authority investment in a minibus!

## **7. Outcomes and outputs**

- The registration of Schools Out West Dorset Ltd – a Community Partnership company limited by guarantee in March 09
- New holiday and term time childcare provision in West Dorset for 24 children opened in September 09
- An established partnership of childcare providers in West Dorset
- A skilled Board of Management (Company Directors)
- A registered charity (application filed November 09)
- Increase from 50% of schools in Dorset providing access to childcare in April 08 to 63% at March 09 and 92% in November 09, according to the TDA database

## **8. Conclusion**

The childcare provision – School's Out West Dorset Ltd is now open and numbers are steadily rising. The Feasibility Study showed adequate numbers however the Board are pleased that the childcare also appears to be creating demand now that families have been aware of it running for the last 4 months, and have also received feedback from other parents and their children who have attended.

The Board is working effectively, representing each school in the partnership and contributing their skills where and when they can (see Appendix 5). The model currently has three Board representatives from St Mary's and one from each of the other schools – this number needs to be increased to have two Board representatives from each of the other schools to balance the vote.

Staff are attending training – specifically on EYFS observation and assessment in a play setting and a Take 5 for Play workshop has been organised for all staff.

Most importantly the children have reported they are having a good time! They are regularly consulted as part of the play sessions and are looking forward to Christmas when the club is open for three full days after the school term school finishes.

## **9. Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Manager Induction programme

Appendix 2 – Photograph

Appendix 3 – Conflict of Interest Policy

Appendix 4 – Governor training slides

Appendix 5 - Meeting minutes – November 23<sup>rd</sup> '09 (last set with Fast Track input)