**The Practice Principles**

**Video 2 of 2**

**Partnerships with professionals**

(00:12 – 00:52)

Anne Stonehouse: What does collaboration mean for you as a professional? It requires you to be open—to value knowledge and perspectives from other disciplines and to open to conversations that might challenge your views and methods. It’s important to emphasise that collaboration does not mean becoming an expert in someone else’s field—instead, it means that each professional is respected for their knowledge and insights. There is no standard format or template for collaboration—each collaboration is unique. Collaborations may be short-term or long-term; they may be for a specific purpose or for many purposes.

(00:52 – 01:15)

Linda McMullan: I was a sole worker for five years and I had an office that I set up for myself and I would return to an empty office at the end of each day, and that was very lonely work. So things have progressed massively over the years and our way of working now represents a great contrast to that.

(01:15 – 01:50)

Kerry Conway: Yeah, I think there’s massive benefits for us working collaboratively, because getting the perspective of other professionals, it’s often very different to if I come in with my limited speech pathology … you know, you come from your area of learning and have a perspective from your area of learning, and it’s just fantastic to get out into the community and incorporate the perspectives of everybody else.

(01: 50 - 02:14)

Jodie Douglas: A good quality collaborative partnership … I suppose I’d be thinking about good communication and providing that support and resources. Sometimes it’s really hard to approach parents with those concerns about their child’s development, so having that support of someone else, it makes you feel more confident in doing it.

(02:14 - 02:45)

Anne Stonehouse: Investing in collaboration is a core part of your work. It will take time and effort. Partnerships between professionals may not happen naturally—they almost always need someone to take action to initiate them and to keep them going. Leaders and managers in services must support working in partnership in order for it to happen, because it takes time, resources and energy. Partnerships can begin with small steps.

(02:45 - 03:07)

Bianca Egan: It’s really about getting the nurses involved in what our educators do, but also learning from what the nurses do; and how that links, and how that marries up, to what we do to achieve the same goal, has been quite challenging, but at the same time, a great learning because we’re now moving in that same vision—but it has taken almost four years to achieve that.

(03:07 - 03:52)

Jenny Kelly: So we’ve made a point of being very involved with the childcare and the kindergarten and being available to them. We have a half an hour once a week, both of the nurses, where we go into the rooms and we are available for questions that they may have, concerns that they may have about any particular children, obviously maintaining privacy, but just general questions. We’re often caught in the kitchen, too—it’s a very informal thing as well. It is interesting because most of us work in either an isolated centre or in a centre that’s co-located, but not necessarily integrated, so it’s been a big learning curve and very interesting to both Margaret and myself to actually come and work in a more integrated service. And I have to say, much more satisfying from our point of view.

(03:52 – 04:12)

Anne Stonehouse: Partnerships between different services can be formal or informal, and they are dynamic and change over time. The most important thing is that a professional partnership meets the needs of each child and family, and that it allows early childhood professionals to work in constructive and positive ways.

(04:12 - 05:54)

Laban Toose: We’ve grown now to about 370 students. They come from a really wide variety of backgrounds. We have a large Korean community, a lot of refugees and English as a second language-speaking families. So the community hub supports that, in that there are many agencies that work together to support those new members of our communities to be functioning in our schools and our children to be in their classrooms. So it was a really great opportunity and something that’s worked really well for us. This isn’t an inward-looking school—that we’re an outward-looking school, looking for opportunities to work with partners, not gain from partners—that’s a very fundamental difference, that we be an active member in the partnership and just not take the educational outcomes, but try to find ways to help those partners deliver their services. So whenever we’ve got an event or something happening, we’ll make sure that the partners are told what’s happening and offered spaces here. The program will encourage partners to have access to the parents that they need to. So we’ve always got to think about those things, about how we can—and it’s an ongoing process—about how we can work well together. We’ve also tried to get people to think about not just the community hub being a space, a physical space, but about a way of working together that, we ultimately have children at the centre, families at the centre of what we’re doing. The maternal health clinic has the interests of newborns and preschool children in the centre of what they’re doing, the same way that we ultimately will work with those children in the prep to six. So the work that they’ve done in the beginning supports us. So we have to consider, and remind ourselves always, that we are in this together, that we are looking at supporting a whole family and making the most opportunities for a whole community.

(05:54 - 07:29)

Sally Beattie: The two things that I’m always banging on about are communication and relationships, building those relationships with families so that they feel they have somebody they trust and can communicate openly with at the school. Well, I think that’s where having a role like mine’s actually really key, because you do need somebody who can be the conduit for all the different partners and to do … it’s really partnership management, and be able to keep communication flow and be available to talk about any sort of hiccups, concerns about whether people are aligned in their vision for what’s happening. You need to bring other people on board sometimes, if there are gaps. And so I find that, in schools, teachers in the classroom often don’t have time to do that, and even sometimes leadership might have release for maybe one day a week to do it, but that’s not enough. So having that coordination role of somebody who can keep the umbrella view is really vital. Having leadership, that definitely … one of the key things is leadership who are open to collaborative practice, because sometimes it takes changing some of the practices of the school in order to do that. The main benefits are that they have then a wealth of experts at hand. I think that, when people work together, it’s like asset-based community development: all the skills of those people come together to enhance the whole. So I find that it means that there are people to bounce ideas off, it makes you think outside the box. Sometimes it helps you get outside your paradigm of whatever your program is, and it helps you really put the clients at the centre.

(07:29)

Anne Stonehouse: It makes good sense to work in partnership with other professionals and services. If you already collaborate with other professionals and services, think about how you can strengthen those relationships for the benefit of children and families. Whether or not you can identify any strong partnerships that you have currently, what steps can you take to initiate new partnerships?