

Insight driving innovation and impact

Healthy Movers Dorset Case Study: Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery

Embedding Healthy Movers activities and supporting school readiness.

July 2022

Introduction

Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery is a small early years setting located just outside Ringwood in Dorset. The Nursery caters for 24 children aged three months old up to eight years old.

Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery joined the Healthy Movers programme in 2021. Healthy Movers is delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST), in partnership with Public Health Dorset. The programme is designed to support two to five year olds’ physical literacy, self-esteem and wellbeing, helping them gain a better start in life.

Background

Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery supports child-led activities and a curiosity approach to learning. The Nursery has five members of staff and the children have access to a secure but natural environment for outside play. The nursery has recently been improving all of its rooms.

Staff at the nursery highlighted that the children particularly struggled with motivation, including their willingness to give things a go. The Nursery has also recently re-organised their rooms so the children are now required to walk up and down the stairs; they found that some children struggled to do this confidently. In addition, the staff have observed that the children heading off to school in September were anxious about the transition and as a result, were feeling quite emotional.

Activities

Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery has embedded Healthy Movers into their Nursery in many ways. They have built Healthy Movers activities into the daily routines for the children, for example they do Healthy Movers activities when walking to the toilet, before nap-time, or when the children play outside.

Healthy Movers has helped the Nursery to develop their curiosity approach, which is a new approach for many of the practitioners, as they have taken the children’s interests and used the Healthy Movers activities to support these. As an example, one child saw some diggers over the weekend so they did the ‘Pick up Packets’ Healthy Movers activities by pretending to be diggers to practice their balancing to pick up and put down objects.



“Healthy Movers really fits the Montessori way of thinking.”

BEEJAL MISTRY, OWNER OF CHERRY TREE MONTESSORI NURSERY

The Nursery has also given all children the opportunity to take part in Healthy Movers activities, including the babies. The babies are often in a dedicated part of the room that the older children play in so when they do Healthy Movers activities they can watch the older children. They also adapt the activities so that the babies can join in as well, for example as part of the ‘Jungle Journey’ Healthy Movers activities, the babies are given cuddly animal toys. Or they are given ribbons attached to hair bands on their wrists that they can wave around as part of activities.

“It’s amazing – it’s helped in absolutely everything. It’s a way of life for us.”

CHARLIE BISS, PRACTITIONER AT CHERRY TREE MONTESSORI NURSERY

Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery has also engaged all parents in the Healthy Movers activities in the following ways:

- Sending letters to parents to explain Healthy Movers and it’s benefits.
- Speaking to parents about Healthy Movers at pick up and drop off.
- Discussing next steps for the children’s physical literacy at parent’s evenings.
- Posting pictures and updates on online apps, such as tapestry.
- Sharing videos showing the practitioners demonstrating how the activities can be done.
- Sending Healthy Movers backpacks and resource cards home.



Benefits

Increasing knowledge and understanding among practitioners



The lead practitioner for Healthy Movers has spent time up-skilling the other staff members. She has created a resource cupboard to support Healthy Movers activities and a notice-board so that staff can easily see what theme they are focusing on. All staff at the nursery deliver Healthy Movers activities and they all have different ideas for each activity, for example linking the activities to different books, songs or activities.

“It’s really helpful because everyone’s got different ideas for each activity.”

CHARLIE BISS, PRACTITIONER AT CHERRY TREE MONTESSORI NURSERY

The lead practitioner emphasised how well Healthy Movers aligns with their curiosity approach to learning and how it is helping them to develop this new approach. Healthy Movers is also supporting them in their day-to-day planning; the lead practitioner highlighted that Healthy Movers covers so many topics and ideas for activities which means it can save them time as they do not have to spend as much time researching, preparing equipment, and setting up activities.

“I think it’s just helped the staff to actually take a moment to just allow the children to do what they want to do....I think it’s actually benefited our teaching quite well.”

CHARLIE BISS, PRACTITIONER AT CHERRY TREE MONTESSORI NURSERY

A student practitioner at the Nursery also attended the Healthy Movers training, which helped to give her a greater understanding of physical literacy and reasons why the movements should be broken down. It has also helped to increase her confidence in delivering activities with the children at the Nursery.

“I think it just really brings her (a student practitioner) out of her shell.”

CHARLIE BISS, PRACTITIONER AT CHERRY TREE MONTESSORI NURSERY

Enhancing children’s physical literacy



The children regularly ask to take part in Healthy Movers activities and are showing an increase in motivation to take part in the activities. What is more, the practitioners have noticed a change in the children’s free-play; they will often see them replicating the skills and movements that they have learnt through the Healthy Movers activities.

The practitioners have used the Healthy Movers physical literacy assessment statements to help pin-point what the children can and cannot do and to highlight areas that they can work on. The results of the assessment have also been discussed with parents.

As a result of the Healthy Movers activities, the children have developed their physical literacy skills, for example some of the children struggled to jump from one foot to two feet but Healthy Movers helped to define what they needed to do to improve this and they can now jump to two feet. Healthy Movers activities have also been used to help calm the children, for example they often track bubbles with their eyes before their naps.

The Nursery Owner has seen the positive impact of Healthy Movers and as a result, is financially investing in the indoor and outdoor space to further support Healthy Movers activities. The setting already has a new room dedicated to Healthy Movers, where children focus on their physical development.

Supporting school readiness



Cherry Tree Montessori Nursery has used Healthy Movers to support children that are starting school later this year. The children have taken the lead but have used Healthy Movers activities as a way of discussing school, including their worries and what to expect when they go. Importantly, Healthy Movers has helped to make it easier for the children to talk about school and has helped to make the transition fun.

“The children are the ones that have turned it [Healthy Movers] into school readiness activities.”

CHARLIE BISS, PRACTITIONER AT CHERRY TREE MONTESSORI NURSERY

Some example are included below:

- Healthy Movers has helped them learn to follow instructions by watching the practitioner doing the Healthy Movers activity and then copying them.
- Healthy Movers has taught them to always have their drinks with them so they have discussed that they should do this at school as well.
- They have taken part in the ‘Hide and Seek’ Healthy Movers activities and discussed how they should always tidy things away and listen to the teacher about where things go.

- Many children did not like going to the toilet and were scared of going when they were at school. They used Healthy Movers activities to make it more fun and exciting, for example by marching like a soldier to the toilet, and then they used the activity as a way to discuss going to the toilet when they go to school.

As a result, the children are less anxious about starting school and are feeling much happier about the transition. The children also talk about how they will teach their new friends some of the Healthy Movers activities when they're at school.

“A few months later, they're so excited to be going to school and they seem to know so much more about what to expect.”

CHARLIE BISS, PRACTITIONER AT CHERRY TREE MONTESSORI NURSERY

Future

The Nursery has three key areas that they plan to work on in the future:

- **Stay and Play session for parents:** The Nursery plans to hold their first Healthy Movers stay and play session for parents to attend. They will deliver the Healthy Movers activities for all children and also use it as an opportunity to discuss recent improvements and changes at the Nursery. They are expecting approximately 40 parents to attend.
- **Up-skilling all staff:** Although all staff do deliver elements of Healthy Movers, the lead practitioner plans to up-skill them further and make sure that all staff are familiar with all of the Healthy Movers resource cards. To support this, the lead practitioner is planning to create some 'emergency packs' for each of the Healthy Movers resource cards so that if staff only have a few minutes, they can easily deliver one of the activities.
- **Developing the activities for toddlers and school-aged children:** Although all children have taken part in the Healthy Movers activities, the Nursery has predominantly focused on developing the Healthy Movers activities for the pre-school children and the babies, so they now want to focus on developing the activities for the toddlers. They also plan to deliver the activities to school children that they care for over the summer holidays.

Top Tips

- ✓ Be guided by the children and choose Healthy Movers activities that support their interests.
- ✓ Use the Healthy Movers physical literacy assessment statements to help pin-point areas of physical literacy that the children need to improve.
- ✓ Encourage all children to take part in Healthy Movers activities; simple adaptations can make the activities accessible for children of all ages and abilities.
- ✓ Embed Healthy Movers activities into daily routines and use the activities to support session planning.



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