

A Celebratory Approach to Working with Children with SEND Victoria's Story



At Pen Green, we use a celebratory approach to working with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which guides both our daily practice and our assessment processes. This case study shares the journey of Victoria, a young child who joined our setting and whose story reflects the power of collaborative, responsive, and rights-based early years support.



To find out more about our approach to working with children with SEND, and to access practical tools to support your daily practice, please visit;

 <https://www.pengreen.org/a-celebratory-approach-to-working-with-children-with-send/>



A Celebratory Approach to Working with Children with SEND

Giving additional support in the Early Years



Initial Contact and Context



Victoria joined Pen Green after her parents submitted an application for a nursery space. At the time of her arrival, neither Victoria nor her family were previously known to the Centre.

Victoria has been diagnosed with Leber's Disease, a rare genetic condition affecting vision. She is certified as severely blind, with medics believing she may only perceive shadows. Due to limited engagement with services—partly as a result of the family's international travel to seek medical insight—Victoria was, until recently, known only to medical professionals.

Victoria's family recently moved to England from Romania and are living in shared accommodation. The main language spoken at home is Romanian. She lives with her mother, father, and baby sister.

Responding with Care and Thoughtfulness

Understanding the significance of Victoria's transition into our setting—and the limited time available before her move to school—our SEND team carefully prepared for her arrival:

- The team considered which nursery space would best meet her sensory and mobility needs, prioritising an uncluttered environment with space to explore safely.
- A Family Worker was appointed to begin building a relationship with Victoria and her family.
- Joint home visits by the Family Worker and SEND Support Worker were carried out over several weeks to establish rapport, understand the family's hopes, and begin information-sharing.

Alongside this, we began liaising with medical professionals to gather important insight into Victoria's diagnosis and current needs.



Immediate Actions

With the family's informed consent, we implemented a structured and supportive plan to ease Victoria into nursery life:



- Planning for her first day: We designed a secure and welcoming area in the room, identified resources likely to engage her, and ensured the presence of an Additional Support Worker (ASW).
- Settling-in process: Victoria began attending with her parents, allowing her to explore the space gradually and develop trust with the adults around her.
- Relationship-building: Particular attention was paid to deepening the bond between Victoria, her Family Worker, and the ASW.
- Short-term targets were co-constructed with her parents, reflecting both developmental goals and their aspirations for her future independence.
- Referrals and evidence gathering: We completed a range of observations and assessments (including one-page profiles and parent voice) to support referrals to the Visual Impairment Team, Specialist Support Services, and for High Needs Funding.
- We introduced the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process to the family, beginning sensitive and informative conversations about what they hoped school support would look like for Victoria.



What We Learned About Victoria



During these initial weeks, we came to know Victoria as:

- A warm and social child who thrives in the presence of familiar adults.
- Someone who delights in reciprocal play and rewards, visibly enjoying praise and shared interactions.
- A child who communicates using single words in both English and Romanian.
- Someone who currently requires intensive physical support to move but demonstrates a strong interest in becoming more independent.
- A valued family member in a household deeply committed to seeking the best outcomes for her and her younger sister.



Celebrating Victoria's Progress

Since joining nursery, Victoria's progress has been remarkable:

- She is now settled in her nursery space and looks forward to attending each day.
- Victoria is beginning to move independently with the support of a walker or cane.
- She has formed secure relationships with key adults in the setting, and her mother is also building strong partnerships with practitioners.
- The family now receives support from the Local Authority Visual Impairment Team and Specialist Support Services.
- With help from nursery staff, the family successfully applied for Disability Living Allowance.
- Following practitioner observations and concerns, Victoria's younger sister is now undergoing genetic testing to assess her visual development.
- The SEND team is currently supporting the family through the process of submitting a Statutory Assessment Request for an EHCP.

Reflections and Looking Forward



Victoria's journey with us highlights the profound impact of early intervention, trusting relationships, and a strengths-based approach to SEND. We have worked in partnership with her family to ensure that she is now receiving the services, funding, and entitlements that will help her thrive—not only at nursery but as she transitions into school.

Her story stands as a testament to what is possible when children are viewed through a lens of possibility, not limitation. We celebrate Victoria's courage, her family's resilience, and the collective commitment of everyone involved in creating a nurturing, enabling environment.

As she prepares to take her next steps into school, we continue to walk alongside her family—ensuring that her voice, needs, and potential remain central to every decision.



View the recording of our recent webinar here;
<https://www.pengreen.org/stronger-practice-hub/sph-webinars/>