



Meet the Partners



Sally Davies

Hub Lead

**Bloomsbury & Goodway
Maintained Nursery Schools**

I am privileged to serve as the Executive Headteacher across two Local Authority–maintained nursery schools in Birmingham: Bloomsbury & Goodway. I am able to do my job because of the wonderful teams that I work with in both schools.

As a partner of the HEART Midlands Early Years Stronger Practice Hub, I have valued the opportunity to connect, collaborate and work in partnership with colleagues from across the West Midlands and beyond.

I strongly believe in the power of networking and the importance of sharing best practice to support continuous improvement in early years education.

I am passionate about ensuring equity for all and I am committed to a trauma-informed, nurture-based approach to practice.

Meet the Partners



Lesley Harris

Hub Partner

**Weoley Castle Maintained
Nursery School**

My name is Lesley and I am delighted to be able to share a little bit about me to introduce myself to you all. I am currently a partner in the HEART Stronger Practice Hub and Head Teacher at Weoley Castle Nursery School, Preschool & Early Learning Hub in South Birmingham.

I have been incredibly fortunate to have been involved in some amazing initiatives during my career and these have shaped my practice and helped me grow as a practitioner and a leader.

I am a Trainer of Trainers for the High Scope Approach and the Glasgow Nurture Principles. We have developed Weoley Castle as a nurture school and have undertaken in-depth research to guide our Ordinarily Available Provision. We have been accredited as a TIAAS Gold school. Happy to share and support others.

Meet the Partners



Michelle Howles

Hub Partner

**Norton Hall Children & Family
Centre**

With over 30 years of experience in early years education, I am passionate about supporting children, families and practitioners to thrive. I hold an NNEB qualification and both a BA and MA in Education, alongside the NPQICL.

Throughout my career, I have remained committed to continuous learning, sector leadership and building strong, meaningful relationships that make a positive difference to children's lives.

I began my career as a nursery practitioner, progressing to deputy and manager roles before becoming a Children's Centre Manager, leading multi-agency teams, family support services and early intervention work. I now manage a charity-run nursery, where my leadership is rooted in nurture principles, emotionally safe practice and the power of relationships.

I am passionate about stories, songs and rhymes, and about creating language-rich experiences that support children's learning and wellbeing. Building strong partnerships with parents and empowering practitioners are central to my work. I am committed to inclusion, safeguarding and high-quality early education, ensuring every child feels a sense of belonging and has the strongest possible foundation for lifelong learning.

Meet the Partners



Claire Fitzgerald

Hub Partner

LMC Childcare Solutions

I am an Early Years leader based in Birmingham, with over 20 years' experience working across the sector. I run a successful childminding provision with a dedicated team of staff, alongside working as a Partner and EYSPA Lead for the HEART Midlands Early Years Stronger Practice Hub.

Through this role, I support practitioners and childminders across the region through networking, professional development, and evidence-informed practice.

I am passionate about championing the childminding sector, promoting equity for all children, and strengthening high-quality early years practice across the wider sector.

Meet the EYSPAs



Sarah Martin

**Early Years Stronger
Practice Adviser**

Hello, I'm Sarah 🖐️

I'm an EYSPA and the Trust EYFS Lead for Washwood Heath Multi Academy Trust, where I work across the Trust to support leaders and practitioners in developing high-quality, inclusive early years provision. Before becoming Trust EYFS Lead, I was an Assistant Headteacher and worked across both the Early Years and Key Stage 1. I have an MSc in Education Leadership and Management, with my Master's dissertation focusing specifically on transitions within the EYFS.

I'm particularly passionate about leadership, inclusion and transitions within the Early Years. I really enjoy working alongside leaders, teachers and practitioners, taking time to understand the individual ethos, vision and context of each setting. As an EYSPA, I can support teams through coaching, professional dialogue and evidence-informed practice, helping them recognise their strengths, identify priorities and consider meaningful next steps for improvement.

Meet the EYSPAs



Lyndsey Handy

**Early Years Stronger
Practice Adviser**

Hello, I'm Lyndsey 🖐️

I'm an EYSPA and I run a busy childminding business alongside three members of staff, providing EYFS childcare, wraparound childcare and Happy Healthy Active Holiday Clubs. I have over 20 years' experience working within the early years sector, across day nurseries, pre-schools, wraparound provision and school-based nurseries, and I've been childminding for just over 15 years. I've also mentored and supported other childminders for my local authority and supported childminders through the Covid Recovery Programme.

I'm passionate about child-led play, giving children the freedom to explore, investigate and follow their own interests while developing independence and problem-solving skills. I genuinely enjoy supporting other childminders through shared practice, collaboration and professional growth. As an EYSPA, I offer bespoke, non-judgemental, one-to-one support through coaching, modelling, reflective dialogue and evidence-informed guidance, helping childminders strengthen their practice, build confidence and develop practical, sustainable action plans.

Meet the EYSPAs



Kate Taylor
Early Years Stronger
Practice Adviser

Hello, I'm Kate 🙋

I'm an EYSPA and a Class Teacher, SENDCo and Inclusion Lead at Weoley Castle Nursery School in Birmingham. I've been an EYFS Class Teacher for around 12 years, working with children aged 2–5 across preschool and nursery settings, and I qualified as a SENDCo in 2017. I also have an MA in Education (SEND and Inclusion) and a BSc in Psychology.

I'm passionate about inclusion and ensuring that all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, experience equity and equality in their education. I enjoy working with children, families and practitioners to problem-solve and break down barriers to learning, using a reflective and nurturing approach. As an EYSPA, I want to help practitioners find their strengths and find solutions that enable children to access learning in a way that suits them, while also being manageable and maintainable for practitioners.

Meet the EYSPAs



Naomi Watkins

**Early Years Stronger
Practice Adviser**

Hello, I'm Naomi 🙋

I'm an EYSPA and an Early Years Lead at a school. I've worked in a variety of settings throughout my career, including as a deputy manager of a private nursery and within school EYFS settings. I've lived and breathed early years from the start of my career and have a wealth of knowledge across many areas of the EYFS.

I'm particularly passionate about play and Forest School and believe the power of play and outdoor learning is incredible. I love watching children grow and learn, and as an EYSPA I'm here to support and empower practitioners, offering support and advice while helping them to make new connections and focus on what matters within their early years setting.

Meet the EYSPAs



Sarah Evans

Early Years Stronger Practice Adviser

Hello, I'm Sarah 🙋

I'm an EYSPA and a Teacher and Outdoor Lead at a Maintained Nursery School in Birmingham. My journey in early years education began in 2005 as part of an action research project, and I have experience of working alongside colleagues from a variety of settings, including maintained nursery schools, PVLs, special schools and primary schools. I've also worked in outreach, helping to create and facilitate early years networks.

I'm passionate about fostering wellbeing and creativity for adults and children, particularly in the outdoors, and I strive for inclusion for all and adapt personalised approaches. I believe a strength of the early years sector is collaboration: through reflection and sharing practice, new perspectives are created and confidence and personal growth are nurtured. As an EYSPA, I can support settings with outdoor learning, EAL, communication and language, PSED, curriculum, disadvantage and leadership.

Meet the EYLLs



Stephanie Lawrence

Early Years Learning Lead Communication & Language

Hello, I'm Stephanie 🙋

My career began in Early Years, where I worked in a range of settings including Sure Start children's centres, private and voluntary settings, and a school-based Foundation Stage Unit, where I worked as a teacher. I later moved into further education, teaching and supporting the development of current and future early years practitioners.

More recently, I worked in adult workforce development across the early years sector, as Senior Quality and Learning Manager on the Early Years Professional Development Programme and later as Learning and Development Lead at Tiney. I'm particularly passionate about communication and language and the difference that high-quality interactions can make to children's development, confidence and future learning. I'm also passionate about ensuring early years practitioners have access to high-quality, meaningful professional development that genuinely changes practice. As the Communication and Language EYLL, I can support settings through observation, modelling, coaching and professional discussion – helping practitioners identify what is already working well and explore practical, evidence-informed ways to strengthen communication and language provision.

Meet the EYLLs



Claire Degenkolb **Early Years Learning Lead** **Personal, Social & Emotional** **Development**

Hello, I'm Claire 🙋

I'm an early years teacher with many years' experience working in early years settings in schools and nurseries in Birmingham.

I'm passionate about child-centred learning and quality indoor and outdoor environment provision.

I currently work at Bloomsbury Nursery School in Nechells, Birmingham, and joined the HEART Midlands Early Years Stronger Practice Hub team in July as a PSED Early Years Learning Lead.

I'm looking forward to my new role and working for the HEART Stronger Practice Hub.

Meet the EYLLs



Caroline Albanese

Early Years Learning Lead Mathematics

Hello, my name's Caroline 🖐️

I've spent the vast majority of the last 24 years teaching and leading within school-based early years settings. In recent years, I've been an Early Years Advisor for a multi-academy trust, facilitating a variety of EYFS professional development programmes and providing school improvement and quality assurance services to early years settings across the West Midlands.

This year, in addition to my HEART role, I will also be the Assistant Maths Hub Lead for Reception for Origin Maths Hub, leading and supporting their EYFS offer. In both roles, I look forward to championing mathematical learning and development and supporting practitioners by providing professional development and bespoke support in settings, to embed numeracy and spatial reasoning in everyday practice.

I hope to work with you soon!

Meet the Hub Team

**Elinor
Warner**
Project Manager



Hello, I'm Elinor!

After working for over 20 years in primary and nursery schools as a teacher and, more recently, a head teacher I decided I wanted a change... but couldn't quite leave the Early Years behind!

Within HEART I lead on the day-to-day operational running of the Hub, as well as planning, data and recording. I am often the first person people will hear from when they contact HEART, and always try to make sure they feel heard and understood. I feel really fortunate to work for an organisation with such passion for the Early Years and the people who work within it.

**Hannah
Hurworth**
Digital
Communications
Officer



Hello, I'm Hannah!

With a background in education and communications, I enjoy finding clear ways to share the Hub's work across our website, social media and newsletters, helping early years practitioners discover useful resources, opportunities and support. I love bringing ideas together creatively and making sure the brilliant work happening across HEART reaches the people who can benefit from it.



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