

# Essential experiences... Learning about jobs

Introducing children to the jobs done by ‘people who help us’ will provide many learning benefits and improve their understanding of the world around them, explains *Penny Tassoni*

Most young children are interested in what adults do and will often try to incorporate what they have learnt into their role play. They pretend to be everything from a parent feeding a baby to a vet examining a sick animal.

While many early years settings focus on traditional roles such as fire-fighters, doctors and police officers, there are plenty of other occupations that fall under the umbrella of ‘people who help us’.

## BENEFITS

Learning about adults’ jobs provides children with many learning opportunities, especially if they are able to watch or participate in some way.

**Language** There are many opportunities for children to develop their vocabulary, as many occupations will use words or phrases that are specific for tasks – such as ‘squidgee’ for a window cleaner or ‘prescription’ for a pharmacist. Children may also use language to ask questions and make links between their own experiences and what they have seen or heard.

**People and communities** Many of the roles that you might look at will have some meaning for children. They might include the barber or electrician. By looking at such occupations, children increase their sense and understanding of their world.

**Literacy** There are many opportunities to highlight literacy when looking at ‘people who help us’, as most job roles involve writing. For some children, seeing how reading and writing occurs in the grown-up world can provide them with an impetus for their own early writing.

**Mathematics** From looking at ‘people who help us’, children can see different aspects of mathematics in the real world. This might include hearing numbers, counting where money changes hands, but also for occupations such as furniture removal, considering shapes and sizes.

**Aspiration** Finally, learning about adult occupations and roles can be enlightening for some children and,



or equipment is likely to be of interest to the children.

## Building on learning

There are many opportunities to develop further from the range of roles within people who help us. A good starting point is to create books, with children using photographs of what they have seen. This can help children remember and talk about the job or the person they saw.

It is also worth planning a range of role-play opportunities that have their starting

point with a real-life experience. Provide plenty of real-life props so children can recreate what they have learnt accurately. This means that if you want to recreate a delivery service, you might look for packing materials, boxes and cards for customers to sign. You may also need to become involved with the play as this will help children use the specific language and actions linked to the role.

## PLANNING A PROGRAMME

It can be worth long-term planning a programme to help children learn about the wide range of occupations that link to ‘people who help us’. A good starting point is to write a list of job roles but remember to think widely about the many ‘people who help us’. This could include breakdown recovery, plumbers, hairdressers, chiropodists, personal trainers and shoe repairers – anyone who in some way provides a service.

By taking this approach you can open up many possibilities to organise visitors, outings and plan role play. Once you have come up with a wide range of occupations, the next step is to find ways of making the job roles come alive for children.

Consider starting by talking to colleagues and parents to see if they have possible contacts. Once you have lined up a possible outing or visitor, alongside the usual risk assessments it can also be worth identifying what aspect of the job role

who knows, may prove to be a source of inspiration, especially for children who have limited knowledge of different job roles.

**The range of jobs that children are likely to be interested in include doctors and hairdressers**

**Things such as having a key cut, waiting for a bus or having a boiler serviced may not seem very notable**

Also valuable is to build in opportunities for children to develop their literacy and mathematical skills. This might include taking money, writing down orders, appointment cards or filling in customer feedback sheets.

## HOME LEARNING

For many parents, things such as having a key cut, waiting for a bus or having a boiler serviced may not seem very notable. They may not realise that watching these things happen can increase children’s vocabulary and knowledge of the world. If we talk to parents about what their child has found interesting and how we have helped children to learn, some parents may start to look again at some of the hidden learning opportunities that exist as part of family life. ■