

Book corner

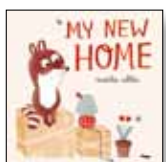


Smelly Louie by Catherine Rayner
Macmillan Children's Books, hardback, £11.99

Louie is not a happy dog. He has just had a bath and, instead of his usual distinctive whiff, he has the aroma of roses and apple blossom. In his quest to recreate his 'own special smell!', he delves into bins, rolls in sludge and dives into a pond. Inevitably, once home, there is only one place for him – the bath, and that sweet smell of roses and apple blossom!

Rayner, a Kate Greenaway medal winner, has created another engaging character and her style catches perfectly this engaging, messy mutt.

My New Home by Marta Altes
Macmillan Children's Books, hardback, £10.99



Little raccoon has just moved house and feels so far away from his old home and friends. But soon he realises that change can be exciting as well as daunting and the unfamiliar

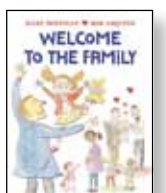
can in no time become very familiar indeed.

This is another hit from prize-winning Altes. She gets to the heart of a child's concerns and offer comfort and reassurance through an endearing set of naively styled characters and a palette of soft autumnal colours.

Welcome to the Family by Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith

Frances Lincoln, hardback, £11.99

Once again, Hoffman and Asquith explore the diversity of the family unit and, in this book,



the many ways that a child can become part of a family, from natural birth within a nuclear family to fostering and adoption.

As in *The Great Big Book of Families* and *The Great Big Book of Feelings*, *Welcome to the Family* manages to convey the complexity of the modern family with humour and sensitivity.

Don't Call Me Sweet! by Smriti Prasad-Halls and Angie Rozelaar

Bloomsbury, paperback, £6.99

When you're a small monster in a hurry to grow up, then you want to be called scary, or stinky,



even slimy – just not sweet... That is until you encounter a big hairy ogre, whose favourite tea-time treat is a grubby little monster. Time to back-pedal.

There is so much to love about this story – the rhyming text, the humour and the illustrations of the sweetest little monster. This could well prove a favourite with children so be prepared to read it again and again.

A matter of opinion

Positive Steps Nursery has set up a children's council to help plan their activities. *Marianne Sargent* reports

Nursery manager Leanne Miller brims with enthusiasm as she explains the children's council she has set up at Positive Steps Nursery in Guildford, Surrey. The council has been running since January this year and children, parents and practitioners are all extremely pleased with the results so far.

The purpose of the council is to give the children an arena within which they can voice their ideas and opinions about the provision they experience every day. The children are encouraged to talk about what they enjoy doing and which aspects of the learning environment they find most stimulating. During council meetings the children are invited to suggest changes and come up with their own ideas for activities.

Mrs Miller describes the council as a positive approach to planning for the children. 'It's all about giving children a voice,' she says. 'It's their nursery and it's all about asking, what do they need and what do they want?'

She explains that the council would not work without the full involvement and commitment of all the practitioners in the setting. 'The key thing is that it is all about the their knowledge of the children,' she explains. 'It's thinking about how we listen to the children. It's about the inclusion of everybody and meeting the needs of everyone.'

AGE IS NO BARRIER

The nursery caters for children from three months to five years old and the children are divided into four rooms according to age. One child is chosen to represent each room on the council. These representatives come together once

a week to talk about what they have been doing and how these activities can be extended and developed into projects that further extend the children's needs and interests.

Babies and very young children are accompanied by their key workers, who share observations and talk about the children's interests on their behalf. Mrs Miller explains how this works.

'We had one baby who really enjoyed messy play but also enjoyed being outside. His key worker told us about this at the meeting and we decided to set up some messy play activities outdoors.'

'We had another baby who really liked shiny objects. We noticed that he was always looking up to the ceiling so we hung shiny things from the ceiling for him to look at.'

Older children, who are more able to speak for themselves, often make comments that lead in surprising directions. This can result in the development of full-scale projects.

'One of our older pre-school children who was on the council said she enjoyed collecting objects. She said she would like to go outside of the setting on walks to collect things. We thought about this and decided





Children are at the centre of planning while a display keeps parents informed

tive about the role their children are playing in decision-making processes. Parents whose children have served time on the council have

that we don't go out enough, so we planned some walks,' says Mrs Miller.

While the children were out they came across a bus stop. This triggered an interest in public transport which then led to a project that involved taking rides on the bus and train.

EVERYONE HAS A VOICE

Although there are only four children sitting on the council at any one time, the nursery involves the older children by distributing questionnaires.

These aim to find out information such as how the children feel about particular rules and routines, their favourite foods, who they like to play with, who they don't know very well and the activities they like best. The questionnaires are handed out once a month and the questions are altered to reflect the needs of the children and any issues of the moment.

POSITIVE PARENTS

Parents are fully involved in the council's work and extremely posi-

expressed how proud they feel, Mrs Miller adds.

'We have an entrance display with the children's names and speech bubbles with what they have said,' she explains. 'We have also hung a folder up that demonstrates development. It contains photos and information about what the children have talked about and been learning. The questionnaires are in there, too.'

This ensures that all parents are able to keep themselves fully informed of the work of the council. As Mrs Miller points out, the display helps to include working parents who are busy and have little time to stop and talk.

Mrs Miller and her staff are very committed to the future of the council. 'It gives the children a voice and it excites the staff and gives them a passion for what they are doing.

'When you know a child is really into something and really enjoying it, it encourages you as a practitioner to embrace it.' ■

FURTHER READING

- *Never Too Young: How Young Children Can Take Responsibility and Make Decisions* by Judy Miller (Save the Children)
- *Starting with Choice: Inclusive Strategies for Consulting Young Children* by Mary Dickins, Sue Emerson and Pat Gordon-Smith (Save the Children)
- *Early Years Observation and Planning in Practice* by Jenny Barber and Sharon Paul-Smith (Practical Pre-School Books)

TAKE NOTE

Musical support

Music Express, a resources package from A&C Black, is now available online as a digital subscription service, containing everything needed to teach music from the Foundation Stage to age 11 and designed to support both specialist and non specialist practitioners.

Music Express Online includes:

- Over 400 songs in a song bank searchable alphabetically or by age, theme, style or format
- Physical, vocal and focus warm-ups for different age groups
- Over 300 lessons, divided by age group and term and searchable by subject or theme.

One year's subscription costs £25; www.musicexpress.co.uk/

SOUND IT OUT

Sound Children – part of the award-winning Drums for Schools – provides a comprehensive package of music resources and support for early years practitioners.

It aims to help them develop their own musicianship, giving them the confidence and skills to deliver music sessions that bring out children's musicality and foster their all-round development.

Key features available are:

- musical instruments made from natural, sustainable materials
- music kits, including 'nursery rhythm' and 'musical baby bonding'. Each comes with ideas and advice for running inspiring sessions, information about the instruments, and free after-sales support.
- videos illustrating the Sound Children approach and the result you can expect to achieve
- a library of early years songs and rhymes, music-making ideas, recordings and research
- free online support from early years music experts plus indexed FAQs
- one-to-one and group training, tailored to your setting's needs.

Kits from £27, training from £177; www.soundchildren.co.uk/; www.drumsforschools.com

