

Meet our Practitioner Advisory Group

Effective early years food policy must work for the children it serves, the families who rely on it, and the people delivering it every day. That means putting their experiences and needs at the heart of how policy is shaped and developed.

It is with this in mind that the Early Years Food Coalition is proud to have brought together a group of brilliant and experienced early years practitioners to form our new Practitioner Advisory Group. Facilitated in partnership with the London Early Years Foundation, the group spans the full range of early years settings: from childminders caring for two children, to larger private or maintained settings welcoming upwards of 50 children each day.

Between them, they bring invaluable insight into managing meal provision on tight budgets, navigating nutrition guidance alongside the many other demands of the day, and supporting families with widely varying needs. Their input will directly inform how the Coalition develops its policy positions, builds its evidence base, and engages with the sector and with government going forward.

We're delighted to have them on board. Meet the group members by reading their stories below:

Annette

I established my childminding setting in 2003 and have spent over twenty years providing personalised, inclusive care from my home in Lambeth. I'm a qualified teacher, Early Years SENCO and Forest School Leader, and I place a strong emphasis on growing food, spending time outside, and cooking from scratch. Lunches are prepared fresh daily and include seasonal fruit and vegetables from the garden where I can manage it. One of the things I think about a lot is how we as adults bring our own complicated relationships with food into our settings, and how important it is not to let that shape the children in our care. I'm honoured to be part of the group and to contribute to shaping policy that works for all children, including those most disadvantaged.



Bettina

I'm the director of The German Kindergarten, a bilingual nursery which I founded after being unable to find a bilingual setting for my own three children. We've been fully plant-based for several years now, across four settings, with a central kitchen in Bermondsey where our chef prepares meals that are delivered out each morning. Food is important to us not just for health reasons but for sustainability too. We focus on pulses, tofu, and seasonal ingredients, and most of our settings have gardens where children grow their own herbs and vegetables. We also do weekly cooking or baking sessions, and we bring a German influence to how we structure meals across the day. Most parents are fully on board, and the children take the food in their stride. I'm looking forward to contributing a perspective on plant-based provision, and what's possible when you commit to it across a whole group of settings.



Candice

My practice is rooted in the Early Years, which sits at the heart of my work. I bring over 18 years of leadership at Loughborough Community Centre (LCC) in Brixton, sustaining safe, inclusive spaces where children, young people, and families can play, learn, and thrive. Based in the Max Roach Centre, LCC holds a 45-year legacy rooted in community resilience following the 1981 Brixton riots, and my practice is shaped by deep listening, co-production, and creativity – leading to award-winning initiatives including Rosebuds Preschool, Summer of Play, and the Windrush Children Festival. I hold Early Years Professional Status alongside a first-class MA in Early Childhood & Education (Integrated Working with Families and Children) from Pen Green Research Base, strengthening my leadership across education, health, and social care, with a focus on early intervention and equity for disadvantaged children.



Carol

I spent many years in the charity sector before retraining as a childminder thirteen years ago and I haven't looked back. My setting in Sidcup runs from my home and a local church hall, and I provide wraparound and holiday care for a large group of children ranging from three to thirteen years old. Feeding that range of ages and appetites is one of the real challenges of the job, and it's something I think about a lot, especially with food costs, time pressures, and changing eating trends making it harder for families. I hope my experience feeding large groups across the day, and my commitment to healthy eating, will be useful to the coalition's work.



Danielle

I'm a senior early years practitioner working in a maintained nursery school in Hertfordshire, and a mum to a young child myself. We work closely with health, education and care professionals to make sure every aspect of a child's development is properly supported, and that joined-up approach shapes how I think about food too. I believe the foundations for lifelong health are laid in the earliest years, and that early years settings have a real role to play in building positive relationships with food and reducing inequalities in access to good nutrition. What matters to me is that policy in this space is realistic for settings to implement, inclusive of all families, and genuinely centred on children's experiences.



Magda

I'm Deputy Headteacher at Greenfields Nursery School and Children's Centre in Southall, and I've worked there for twenty-two years, starting as a newly qualified teacher. Greenfields is in a very deprived area of the London Borough of Ealing, and many families live in shared accommodation with limited cooking facilities. I'm passionate about providing all children with a healthy start in life, including ensuring the food we offer is healthy and balanced. In the last few years we've adapted our menus to ensure everything is cooked on-site, including veggie and fish fingers, and we've decided to allow packed lunches to encourage children to try new foods and textures. I'm looking forward to bringing that practical experience to the group's work.



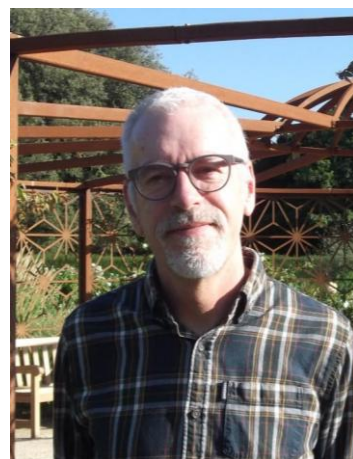
Marcia

I'm a Child and Family Support Practitioner and Food Education Lead in a North London primary school. My work sits across pastoral care, multi-agency support, and using food and gardening as a way into social and emotional wellbeing. I've seen first-hand how powerful those connections can be for children and families. I'm currently completing an MA in Integrative Arts Psychotherapy, with a particular interest in belonging and intergenerational trauma, and that shapes a lot of how I think about children's relationships with food. I've also been a Real Bread Campaign ambassador for four years, which reflects a wider commitment to food that's genuinely good for people and communities. I'm glad to be bringing that mix of perspectives to the group.



Marlon

I'm Head of Early Education at 1st Place in Southwark, where I oversee two Reggio-inspired nurseries. I'm a qualified teacher and Forest School Trainer, and my practice has been shaped by time spent training in both the UK and Denmark, where I was influenced by the Reggio Approach, Steiner Waldorf and the Udeskole movement. Those experiences cemented my love for outdoor learning and early years education, and they underpin how I lead and teach today. I'm particularly interested in how the forest school ethos can be brought into urban environments in ways that are innovative and sustainable. Food and growing are a natural part of that, and I'm looking forward to bringing that perspective to the group.



Mary

I've been a childminder for over twenty years and have also run three children's playgroups in my local community. It is work that I love and find genuinely rewarding. Family is central to everything I do, and so is continuing to learn. I've worked abroad as an English teacher in Korea and Japan, which gave me a much broader understanding of different cultures and approaches to food and care. I'm currently completing a counselling qualification, and that commitment to supporting others runs through everything I do in my setting. I'm looking forward to bringing that breadth of experience to the group.



Samantha

I'm the founder and childminder of Mini Moons, and I've worked in childcare and education for over fifteen years, the last five as a childminder. Childminding gave me a much deeper understanding of food and nutrition than I'd had before, and made me realise just how central it is to what we do and the responsibility that comes with it. I've been an active advocate for childminders and the childminding sector for some time, and being involved in policy work like this feels important. It's a chance to make sure childminders are properly considered in conversations that affect the children and families we work with every day.



Titi

My passion for working with young children began at home, caring for my own. That love for nurturing and educating children led me to start a childminding business, and as demand for good quality, caring provision grew, I took the step of expanding into a full nursery, Kings & Queens, which I founded and now run. I believe every child, regardless of age or background, is full of potential, and that it's our job in the early years to recognise that and build on it. That conviction shapes everything about how we operate, the environment we create, the relationships we build with families, and the care we put into every part of the day, including food. I'm looking forward to bringing that perspective, and the realities of running an independent nursery, to the coalition's work.

