

From Supporting Lunches to Supporting Learning Dundee's ELC Workforce Development in Practice

Louise Cussick's journey into Early Learning and Childcare illustrates how Dundee City Council identifies, nurtures and develops potential within its workforce.

Louise began working in a Dundee nursery as a kitchen assistant, a role she held for nearly ten years. What Louise didn't realise was that, alongside supporting lunches, she was already developing the foundations of a role with children.

During her time in the nursery, she naturally spent time engaging with them, chatting at lunch, and responding when they approached her. During the COVID period in particular, when groups were smaller and the environment quieter, these interactions became more frequent.

They weren't part of her job description. They were simply natural moments. Louise followed children's curiosity, encouraged conversation, and supported learning without realising that's what she was doing. It was a nursery manager who recognised what this meant. He saw Louise's instinct, confidence, and ability to connect with children, and encouraged her to apply for an Early Years Support Assistant (EYSA) role. Louise hadn't considered working in early years before, but someone else seeing her potential and pointing it out made all the difference.

This early recognition of transferable skills reflects a key part of Dundee's approach - looking beyond formal qualifications to identify potential in practice.

Taking a chance

Encouraged to apply for an EYSA role, Louise took a leap. At that point, she didn't have formal early years qualifications. What she did have was experience and transferable skills.

But this wasn't just about a job opportunity. For Louise, it came at the right moment in her life. Her children were older, and for the first time in a long time, she had space to think about what she wanted for herself. What had once been a practical job that fit around family life began to feel like an opportunity to try something new, and to build something for the future.



“This was the time for me... I’m going to do this for me.”

The role offered more than a change in day-to-day work. It offered the chance to gain qualifications, develop new skills, and step into a career she hadn’t previously considered.

Louise brought with her a strong foundation; she understood children, communicated well, supported independence, and built relationships naturally. Crucially, she was able to reflect on those experiences and translate them into her application.

As Wendy Knight, Senior Early Years Development Officer (Education Learning & Inclusion) at Dundee City Council explains:

“This is about recognising transferable skills and having the confidence to take a chance. By capturing that potential, giving time to grow and learn, you don’t just offer an opportunity - you set the foundations for a whole new journey to begin.”

Starting in her Early Years Support Assistant role, Louise quickly realised she had found something that felt right. But this wasn’t just about enjoying the work. Louise actively immersed herself in it.



She didn’t wait to be asked. She stepped in when colleagues needed support, joined group activities, and consistently looked for ways to contribute more. Whether supporting group times, helping colleagues, or building relationships with children and families, she began to go beyond what was expected of her role.

She also sought out opportunities to develop her practice. For example, she became

involved in family learning work, supporting sessions such as PEEP and Bookbug, helping to build relationships not just with children, but with their families too.

“As soon as the training came up, I was like, I’ll do it.”

This willingness to step forward and take on new experiences demonstrated both confidence and commitment. Her colleagues noticed her confidence growing. Her managers noticed. And importantly, she began to recognise it in herself.

Within Dundee’s ELC workforce, this kind of initiative and potential is not only recognised but also nurtured and developed.

Support, belief and opportunity

Louise’s journey wasn’t just about her own determination; it was shaped by the people around her, and by Dundee City Council’s wider approach to workforce development in Early Learning and Childcare. From the beginning, she was supported.

She was encouraged to apply, given help with her application, supported through her interview, and welcomed into a team that believed in her potential.

But beyond individual support, Dundee’s ELC team has developed a clear and consistent approach to growing its workforce. This includes recognising transferable skills, not just formal

qualifications, and creating entry routes through roles like Early Years Support Assistant.

There is a strong partnership with Dundee and Angus College, ensuring that learning in the workplace and learning through qualifications go hand in hand. Expectations are clear, but so are the opportunities. Staff are encouraged to take ownership of their development, to put themselves forward, and to actively build the experience needed to progress within the Dundee workforce.

“You can make this what you want... if you show your ability, you will be given opportunity.”

There is also a strong emphasis on valuing every role within the team:

“You’re not ‘only’ something... without your contribution, we can’t operate.”

This culture, where potential is recognised early, nurtured intentionally, and supported through clear pathways, underpins Dundee City Council’s approach to workforce development and creates the conditions for stories like Louise’s to happen. It’s not accidental. It’s designed.

Becoming an Early Years Educator

Louise quickly progressed to achieve her Level 3 qualification through Dundee and Angus College, combining practical experience within her Dundee setting with structured learning.

But this milestone was about much more than gaining a qualification. For Louise, it represented a moment of real personal achievement, something she had done for herself, at a time in her life when she was ready to take that step. She speaks fondly of her graduation, not just as a professional milestone, but as an emotional one.

“My kids were in the audience...they were screaming ‘go mum’...They were so proud of me.”

Watching her children celebrate her success was a powerful moment. The journey had built her confidence, validated her abilities, and given her a clear sense of direction.

Today, she works as an Early Years Educator in a large, diverse Dundee nursery, supporting children and families from a wide range of backgrounds.

Workforce Insight

Louise didn’t enter ELC through a traditional route. She didn’t start with qualifications, or even with a plan for a career in early years. But she had the qualities that matter.

Her story is a reminder that talent doesn’t always arrive fully formed. Sometimes it’s already there - just waiting to be recognised.

Dundee City Council’s approach demonstrates what is possible when systems are designed to:

- recognise potential early
- create flexible entry points
- and support progression through real experience in practice

By valuing transferable skills and providing clear pathways into roles such as Early Years Support Assistant, Dundee has created opportunities for people like Louise to enter, develop and thrive within the workforce.

With the right support, belief and opportunity, people like Louise don’t just join the workforce - they strengthen it.