

Amy Cox (2412700)

ECEY6012

Leadership skills in entrepreneurship

Cover sheet

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Assignment title and number: ECEY6012 Leadership skills in entrepreneurship.

AI Cover Sheet

Section 1: Business pitch (presented via Teams).

Section 2: Business Plan.

Section 3: A critical analysis of the potential impact of the business plan/chosen concept on the development of young children.

Reference list

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) on multiple occasions throughout the assignment to check my work using the prompts:

1. Check the text for readability, grammar, and syntax.

I acknowledge the use of Microsoft Copilot (<https://copilot.microsoft.com/>) on multiple dates throughout the assignment, using prompts such as:

1. Find and summarise academic journal articles dated within the past 10 years on sensory interventions for early years children.
2. Produce a mock-up logo for a company named Sensory Support Station, make it fun and appealing to children.
3. Produce an image of the interior of a sensory van, including fidgets, soft lighting.
4. Produce an alternative view of the sensory van to include a hammock and a calm area.

I acknowledge the use of Canva (<https://www.canva.com/templates>) on 4 February 2026, using prompts in the search bar such as:

1. Business plan front cover template.
2. Images relating to innovation, children and sensory.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

BUSINESS PLAN

Sensory Support Station



(Copilot, 2026a)



(Copilot, 2026b)



(Copilot, 2026c)

Amy Cox (2412700)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sensory support station is a mobile, early years-focused service designed to bring high-quality sensory support directly to children, families and practitioners. Operating from a fully equipped sensory van, it removes barriers such as long waiting lists, travel demands, limited funding and lack of sensory spaces. This overview outlines the purpose, innovation, benefits, challenges and audience for the service, supported by relevant early years policy and research.

INNOVATION AND RATIONALE

The sensory support station is innovative because it challenges the traditional clinic-based model by meeting the child where they already are, in nurseries, schools, homes and community spaces. This mobile, preventative approach aligns with early years priorities such as inclusion, early intervention and equitable access (Welsh Government, 2021).

Its innovation lies in:

Mobility, flexibility and accessibility: The van can support individuals, small groups, workshops and community outreach. Bringing sensory support directly to settings removes geographical and logistical barriers (Senedd Research, 2024a; Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW), Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn, 2024a; Welsh Government, 2021).

Early intervention: Providing timely sensory input supports regulation and prevents escalation of behavioural challenges (Schmid, 2022; Welsh Government, 2024a).

This model is particularly valuable in rural or underserved areas where access to specialist support is limited (HIW, CIW and Estyn, 2024a).

BENEFITS FOR EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT

High-quality sensory experiences play a crucial role in early childhood development (Welsh Government, 2024a).

The Sensory Support Station supports:

Regulation: Tailored sensory input helps children regulate emotions, behaviour and attention, supporting executive functioning and participation (Little *et al.*, 2018; Welsh Government, 2020a).

Inclusion: By bringing sensory-rich experiences directly to children, the mobile model supports needs-led, inclusive practice consistent with the principles of the *Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018* (Welsh Government, 2018).

Reduced barriers: The mobile model removes obstacles such as transport, cost and lack of dedicated sensory spaces, supporting equitable access to early intervention (Bradford, Caffery and Smith, 2016; Welsh Government, 2024a).

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

While the model is innovative, several challenges must be acknowledged:

Funding limitations: Reliance on grants, crowdfunding and community partnerships may affect the long-term sustainability of the service (Jayawardhana, Fernando and Siyambalapitiya, 2022).

Awareness, trust and engagement: New services require time to build credibility and trust with families and settings (Welsh Government, 2025a; Welsh Government, 2023).

Operational constraints: Weather, travel costs and vehicle maintenance may impact delivery.

Policy and safeguarding requirements: Mobile services working with children must meet strict standards for data handling, insurance and risk assessment (Welsh Government, 2021; UK Parliament, 2018).

Resource replacement: Sensory equipment requires ongoing upkeep and replenishment.

These challenges will be explored in greater depth in Part 2.

TARGET AUDIENCE AND STAKEHOLDERS

The sensory support station serves a wide range of early years stakeholders, including:

- Nurseries, playgroups and preschools.
- Primary schools (Reception and Key Stage 1).
- Home-educating families.
- Parents and carers of neurodivergent, sensory-seeking or anxious children.
- Community organisations supporting wellbeing and inclusion.
- Local authorities seeking flexible early intervention options.

These groups could benefit through improved understanding, increased confidence and accessible sensory support.

OVERVIEW OF THE SERVICE

The sensory van provides a safe, calming and engaging environment.

Features include:

- Soft lighting and adjustable ambience.
- Tactile and fidget resources.
- Movement-based equipment, such as wobble seats.
- Visual and auditory tools.
- A cosy, low-stimulus, breakaway retreat area.
- Portable resources for indoor and outdoor sessions.

Services offered:

- Sensory support sessions for individuals or small groups.
- Community pop-up sessions.

BRIEF FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Indicative startup costs:

Van purchase and conversion	£4000-£12000
Sensory equipment	£500-£1200

Branding and marketing	£150-£400
Insurance and legal setup	£300-£600
Website and booking system	£150-£400

Ongoing costs:

Fuel and maintenance	£80-£160
Insurance	£80-£160
Equipment replacement	£20-£50
Operational materials	£30-£60

FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

A mixed-income model (sessions, subscriptions, grants, crowdfunding) supports accessibility. However, funding challenges include:

- Competition for grants
- Unpredictability of community fundraising
- Balancing low-cost provision with sustainability

These issues will be critiqued further in Part 2, B.

WHY AM I BEST PLACED TO DELIVER THIS?

With lived experience as a full-time mother to two neurodivergent children and academic grounding as a BA in Early Years Education and Care student, I bring an understanding of sensory needs, early years development and inclusive practice. My hands-on experience as a mother and my commitment to neurodiversity-affirming support positions me uniquely to deliver a service that is informed and impactful.

CONCLUSION

The Sensory Support Station is an innovative, inclusive and accessible approach to early years sensory support. By bringing services directly to children and the adults who care for them, it addresses clear gaps in provision. It aligns with key early years policies and development theory, such as Shanker's (2010) Self-Reg Theory, Ayres' (1972) Sensory Integration Theory (1972), Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model and Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. This overview provides the foundation for a deeper critique and analysis in Part 2, B.

Critical analysis of the potential impact the Sensory Support Station could have on the development of young children.

The concept discussed in this essay is the Sensory Support Station (hereafter referred to as the station or van), a mobile van designed to deliver sensory-informed support directly to young children, within their everyday environments. By travelling to early years settings, community spaces and family homes, the Station aims to remove many of the barriers that currently delay or restrict access to early intervention, particularly for neurodivergent children and those awaiting statutory or specialist assessment. Its purpose is to offer timely and relational support during a period when families often feel overwhelmed, unsupported and left to navigate complex systems alone (Carroll, 2018; Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020a). This essay critically analyses the potential impact of the Station on young children's development, comparing it with existing early years provisions and exploring how it aligns with contemporary policy and research. In doing so, it examines the developmental benefits the model may offer, alongside the barriers and challenges inherent in delivering a mobile, community-based service. Through this analysis, the essay evaluates whether a mobile sensory service can meaningfully enhance early intervention pathways and contribute to more equitable, responsive support for young children and their families.

The Station has the potential to offer a range of developmental benefits for young children, particularly those who are neurodivergent or experiencing sensory processing differences. The benefit is rooted in the idea that children can step into a dedicated sensory space, situated directly outside of their everyday environments. It differs from the often busy, overstimulating spaces of early years settings and clinic-based intervention settings. Inside the van, children encounter a curated range of sensory exploration equipment and resources that support regulation and engagement in ways that other settings cannot always provide.

Research shows that sensory-rich, intentionally designed environments enable children to modulate their arousal levels (Rodriguez and Kross, 2023), promoting self-regulation, emotional stability and readiness to learn, aligning with Shanker (2010; 2013), who argues that children regulate best when environments reduce stressors and provide calming sensory input, supporting their emotional

development. In addition to this, the van's design also reflects Ayres' Sensory Integration theory (1972), which highlights the importance of structured, meaningful sensory experiences to support neurological organisation and functional engagement. Stepping into the van creates a clear environmental transition, signalling safety and predictability. This is supported by evidence from Piller *et al.* (2025) and Schaaf *et al.* (2018), showing that predictable, sensory-adapted environments help children regulate more effectively and how this is particularly beneficial for neurodivergent children who may struggle with noise, unpredictability or sensory overload.

These benefits directly align with the Welsh inclusion policy. The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Plan (ECPLC) (Welsh Government (WG), 2024a, p.4) emphasises that all children have the right to access "happy, healthy, safe and inclusive environments," and that early years' provision must adapt to meet diverse needs. The Station provides a practical mechanism for achieving this by offering an inclusive, low-stress environment that settings often cannot create due to space, staffing or resource limitations. Similarly, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code for Wales (WG, 2021) requires that provision removes barriers to learning and supports children's views, wishes and feelings. By reducing sensory overload and enabling children to reach a "ready to learn" state, the station fulfils this statutory expectation and strengthens early intervention.

This also fits in line with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which positions physiological and safety needs as the foundation for all higher-level development. For many neurodivergent children, sensory overwhelm directly threatens these foundational needs by triggering stress responses, discomfort or fear. The Station helps restore a sense of physical and emotional safety by providing predictable sensory input, reducing environmental demands and creating a calm, regulated space. Once these basic needs are met, children are more able to progress to Maslow's higher levels: belonging, esteem and engagement. Through this process, the van not only supports immediate regulation but also creates the conditions necessary for meaningful learning, social interaction and self-confidence to emerge (Maslow, 1943).

Furthermore, the service responds to current concerns about exclusion in the early years across Wales. Reports from the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021) have highlighted rising exclusions and unofficial exclusion practices affecting younger children, with many behaviours linked to unmet sensory or communication needs. Welsh Government (2020b) guidance states that exclusion should only be used as a last resort, particularly for children with ALN and that settings must demonstrate that all alternatives have been exhausted. The Station provides one of these alternatives: a specialist, on-site, preventative intervention that reduces escalation, supports regulation and helps settings meet their legal and ethical responsibilities to keep children included. By offering an environment that removes sensory triggers and supports emotional stability, the station reduces the likelihood of behaviours being misinterpreted as “challenging,” thereby addressing a recognised national concern (Tamblyn *et al.*, 2022; Raevsky, Nabalta and Atilas, 2025).

In addition, sensory regulation plays a role in supporting social, emotional and relational development. When children feel regulated, they are more able to participate in play, communicate effectively and form positive relationships with peers and adults (Housman, 2017; Pfeiffer *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, sensory experiences naturally stimulate language through descriptive, action-based vocabulary such as push, pull, squishy or hard and help children reach a “ready to engage” state in which listening, turn-taking and reciprocated communication become possible (Prins *et al.*, 2023). Expanding this further, Cacola, Miller and Williamson (2017) found that effective sensory regulation also reduces behaviours such as meltdowns and shutdowns that often mask underlying communication difficulties or emotional needs, enabling children to engage more confidently within their social world.

Beyond communication, sensory input is also the gateway for higher-order thinking by calming the nervous system and reducing cognitive load, freeing up working memory for problem-solving and learning (Alhamdan *et al.*, 2023). Children cannot think, plan or learn effectively when they are dysregulated (Goodall *et al.*, 2022), and the station removes this barrier entirely by providing a dedicated environment that supports regulation before engagement. This developmental impact can also be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1976),

which emphasises that children's development is shaped by interactions across multiple interconnected environments. When the van supports regulation within one microsystem, it strengthens the child's capacity to participate meaningfully in others, such as the classroom, homes or wider community. Therefore, the Station does not simply improve momentary regulation; it enhances the child's ability to engage across their broader ecological network, supporting more stable relationships, improved communication and greater inclusion in their everyday experiences.

By combining evidence-based sensory practices with the priorities of Welsh inclusion policy (WG, 2016), the Station positions itself as a meaningful, preventative response to exclusion, inequity and unmet needs in the early years. Not only is it equipped to enhance children's developmental outcomes but it also strengthens settings' capacity to deliver on national expectations for inclusive, accessible and child-centred practice.

However, an evaluation of current sensory regulation in the early years reveals significant structural gaps that directly affect children's regulation, behaviour, participation and wellbeing. While many Welsh early years settings offer basic sensory experiences through continuous provision, these approaches are rarely sufficient for children with more complex sensory processing needs (Schaaf *et al.*, 2018; Little *et al.*, 2018). Research and policy across Wales consistently highlight the need for early intervention, equitable access and inclusive practice, yet the reality is that children often wait months for support. The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's *Worried and Waiting* report (2024) shows that early intervention is routinely delayed because acute services are overwhelmed, creating system-wide bottlenecks that disproportionately impact the early years. StatsWales (2024) data reflect the same pattern, despite a 28-day target, many children wait over eight weeks for therapeutic input under Local Primary Mental Health Support Services. These delays compound challenges: behaviours escalate, families become overwhelmed and settings struggle without the right tools to support children, demonstrating a clear mismatch between policy and lived experiences (WG, 2024b).

A review of current provision reveals that despite the availability of sensory provisions in Wales, every existing option is hindered by notable limitations. Static sensory rooms, such as those at Merthyr Integrated Children's Centre (n.d.), require

families to travel, operate within restricted hours and cannot reach children in their everyday environments. Sensory hubs such as Sense Cymru (n.d.) offer valuable support but are not mobile and are targeted to specific disabilities rather than early years inclusion. Additionally, CAMHS (Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB, 2025) provides mental health focused intervention rather than sensory support and is constrained by long waiting lists and strict thresholds. There are also options for private occupational therapy services, such as Seirrah Therapies (2025), that offer sensory strategies but these are high-cost, clinic-based and often limited in availability. This leaves a clear gap: Wales has no mobile, low-cost, early years-focused sensory service that brings support directly to the child. The consequences of this gap are well documented. Ongoing sensory dysregulation is associated with increased behavioural incidents, emotional overwhelm, missed learning opportunities and heightened stress for families and practitioners (Little *et al.*, 2018; Schmid, 2022). Evidence also shows that effective sensory regulation improves engagement, reduces behavioural challenges and supports inclusive participation (Ayres, 1972; Shanker, 2010; 2013).

The Station directly responds to these systemic shortcomings by offering immediate, accessible, preventative support while families wait for statutory or specialist provision (WG, 2021b; Estyn, 2023b). Its mobility addresses geographical inequalities, and its design aligns with evidence that predictable, sensory-adapted environments support regulation more effectively than overstimulating mainstream spaces (Schaaf *et al.*, 2018; Little *et al.*, 2018).

However, despite the Station offering a response to gaps in early years sensory provision, it also faces several barriers and challenges that influence its sustainability, operational capacity and long-term impact. A key barrier is accessibility through scheduling. Because the van operates on a rota or commissioned basis, the children cannot access it spontaneously at the moment that dysregulation occurs. This contrasts with the Welsh Government's emphasis on embedded, everyday environmental adaptation within the ECPLC (2024a), which encourages settings to provide continuous access to inclusive, regulation-supportive spaces. It also sits in tension with Shanker's Self-Reg theory (2010; 2013), which highlights the importance of responding to stressors in real time to prevent

escalation. The van therefore supplements, rather than replaces, the need for in-setting sensory-informed practice.

Another challenge relates to consistency and generalisation. The sensory environment inside the van is controlled, predictable and intentionally designed but children must return to mainstream environments that remain unpredictable and overstimulating (Kapp *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, without strong collaboration and follow-through from practitioners, there is a risk that regulation achieved in the van does not transfer back into the child's daily routines. This reflects wider evidence highlighted by Pfeiffer, Clark and Arbesman (2018) showing that sensory interventions are most effective when integrated with relational co-regulation and environmental modification, not delivered in isolation. This further aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (1976), which emphasises that change in one microsystem (the van) cannot be sustained unless other microsystems (home and classroom) adapt alongside it. The van therefore relies on practitioners and families being willing and able to integrate sensory strategies into their own spaces, something that varies widely across settings.

A further barrier is funding stability. The model relies on grants, crowdfunding and community partnerships, which are inherently unpredictable and can restrict long-term planning (Social Enterprise UK, 2021). Research on social enterprises highlights that dependence on short-term or community-driven funding streams increases financial vulnerability and limits the ability to scale or sustain services (Jayawardhana, Fernando and Siyambalapitiya, 2022). In Wales, where early intervention budgets are under pressure, securing consistent funding remains a significant challenge (Children in Wales, 2025).

The Station must also navigate extensive policy, safeguarding and regulatory requirements, which present considerable operational demands for a mobile early years' service. The Welsh Government (2022b) guidance places a strong emphasis on robust safeguarding, data protection and risk-management systems and these expectations become more complex when support is delivered in a mobile environment. Compliance with the Additional Learning Needs Code (WG, 2021), UK safeguarding legislation (UK Parliament, 2018) and the General Data Protection Regulation (European Union, 2016) requires clear accountability structures, safe

working practices, secure data-handling, lone working procedures, vehicle-specific risk assessments and appropriate insurance. These requirements are necessary for safety and public trust but are resource-intensive and require ongoing administrative capacity.

Finally, resource upkeep and equipment replacement present ongoing challenges. Sensory equipment requires regular cleaning, maintenance and replenishment, particularly high-use items that wear quickly (Public Health Wales, 2014). Ensuring the van remains safe, hygienic, and fully equipped with the highest quality resources demands continuous investment and careful resource management. This also reflects Ayres' Sensory Integration theory (1972), as the quality, safety and consistency of sensory input directly influence children's ability to regulate and engage.

Together, these barriers highlight that while the Station is a highly innovative and much-needed intervention, its long-term impact depends on sustainable funding, operational resilience, strong partnerships and effective integration with everyday practice across children's ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

It is also worth noting that the Station is inherently scalable due to its mobile design, allowing the model to be replicated across multiple localities without the need for fixed premises or major investment. Its flexible structure enables delivery in schools, communities and homes, making expansion responsive to local need (Wales Centre of Public Policy, 2026). The approach also lends itself to strong cross-sector partnerships, offering value to early intervention, education, health, social care and third-sector organisations that are seeking accessible, preventative sensory support (WG, 2025a). Additionally, this creates opportunities for joint commissioning, shared delivery models and integrated multi-organisational outreach, echoing the principles set out in the No Wrong Door agenda for joined-up, wrap-around support for children and families (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020;2022).

To conclude, the Sensory Support Station offers a promising and innovative response to long-standing gaps in early intervention, particularly for young children who struggle to access timely, sensory-informed support. By operating within children's everyday environments, the model has the potential to reduce barriers, strengthen regulation and foster inclusion in ways that complement existing early

years provision. Ultimately, it is a scalable, preventative model that could enhance early support pathways for young children and their families, while also offering complementary support for early years practitioners.

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