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# NURSERY BUSINESS

ISSUE 01 ❖ EARLYYEARS.TEACHWIRE.NET

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to 'outstanding'

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E-LEARNING  
JOURNALS &  
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### MARG RANGLES:

HOW WE GREW  
BUSY BEES

### BUYING A NURSERY?

6 THINGS YOU  
NEED TO KNOW

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# Hello...

There can be few vocations more rewarding than leading a nursery setting. Children learn more quickly during the early years than at any other time, and the experiences they have before they reach the age of five lay the foundations for the rest of their lives. That means that those with the responsibility for providing the care and education they receive make a lasting difference to countless individuals, families and society as a whole. If that isn't enough to get you up in the morning, nothing will be!

At the same time, there are few vocations more challenging than leading a nursery. It is not a profession in which you will get rich quick, and turning a profit while maintaining the high quality of your provision requires a wide variety of skills. You will need to be good with children, good with parents and good with money, all at the same time. In this respect, the nursery business is truly like no other.

The good news is that help is available. Whether you are taking your first steps into the nursery sector or contemplating expanding an established business, taking on a management role or seeking to recruit or develop capable leaders, you will find support everywhere you look – not least in this very publication, which features contributions from experienced owners and consultants designed to guide you on your way. We hope you find it useful!

**Jacob Stow**  
Editor



**FIND  
EXPERT  
ADVICE ON  
OUTSTANDING  
NURSERY PRACTICE  
IN *TEACH EARLY  
YEARS* MAGAZINE -  
TURN TO PAGE 70  
TO FIND OUT  
MORE.**

## THE EXPERTS



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# Contents

## 6 "WE CAN LEARN A LOT FROM BUSINESS"

June O'Sullivan explains how...

## 9 "YOU'LL LOVE LEADING A NURSERY"

You're in a role in which you can make a real difference, says James Hempsall.

## 11 "PROFIT IS NOT A DIRTY WORD"

Your nursery won't be outstanding if it can't make money, says Chris Townson.

## 13 ZERO TO 'OUTSTANDING'

Take the road to success from day one...

## 17 SHARING KNOWLEDGE

There's a wealth of support available from the sector, says Fiona Webb.

## 19 AN INSPECTOR CALLS...

An Ofsted inspection needn't be stressful, says Theresa Johnson.

## 22 "HELP US TO IMPROVE!"

Kathy Brodie offers tips on sourcing the right consultant for your setting.

## 24 GROWING BUSY BEES

Even successful businesses have to start somewhere, as Marg Randles explains.

## 27 YOUR FIRST STEPS

Deborah Robinson presents a guide to starting out in the nursery sector.

## 28 LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Peers Carter shares advice for those planning to open a nursery business.

## 30 "WE WANT IT TO BE PERFECT"

NB speaks to the owners of newly opened Fount Nursery in Hackney.

## 35 DRESS TO IMPRESS

Your choice of staff uniform can say a lot about your nursery.

## 36 CREATING SAFE & EFFECTIVE SPACES

Melanie Pilcher explains what to consider when planning your nursery's interior.

## 39 ARE YOUR WASHROOMS OUTSTANDING?

Don't underestimate the importance of your nursery's toilets, says Ged Hirst.

## 41 INVESTING IN YOUR OUTDOORS

Improving your nursery's garden area can pay dividends.

## 45 3 STEPS TO SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

How can focusing on being green help your business?

## 46 OFFER SOMETHING MORE

Giving parents a broader range of services can boost revenues and help you stand out from the crowd.

## 49 AM I CHARGING ENOUGH?

You need to know how much your nursery costs and what parents think it's worth before setting your fees, says Chris Townson.

## 52 BOOSTING YOUR BUDGET

Lorraine Jenkin explains how to raise funds without raising blood pressures.

## 54 SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GROW?

Expanding your nursery business requires a clear plan, says Sarah Steel.

## 57 WHY YOU'LL LOVE E-LEARNING JOURNALS

They can make running an outstanding nursery easier, explains Deborah Fielden.

## 63 5 WAYS SOFTWARE CAN BOOST YOUR EFFICIENCY

Chris Reid explains how you can save your business time and money.

## 77 ARE YOU AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE?

Recruiting and retaining great staff isn't just about paying the highest wages, says Emma Rooney.

## 78 WE NEED MORE MEN!

We must do more to recruit male practitioners, says David Wright.

## 81 TRAIN THEM YOURSELF

When money is tight, deliver CPD in-house, says Kirstine Beeley...

## 82 DEVELOPING OUTSTANDING STAFF

Fay Gibbin explains how Busy Bees is upskilling its team.

## 84 HOW SAFE IS YOUR SETTING?

Getting health and safety right is essential, says Laura West.

## 87 5 DISASTERS YOU WEREN'T EXPECTING

Good insurance is more vital than you might realise, says Jerry Beere.

## 90 HOW NOT TO LEAD A NURSERY

Try to avoid making your staff feel insignificant, impoverished and defeated, says Jonny Keen...

# BOOST YOUR BRAND!

## MARKETING TIPS TO HELP GROW YOUR BUSINESS...

## 64 WHAT DOES YOUR WEBSITE SAY ABOUT YOU?



It's vital your online presence gives parents a good first impression, says Richard Duddy.

## 66 GOING SOCIAL



Facebook and the like are valuable marketing tools, but only if you use them properly, says Kate Tyler.

## 73 MARKET WITH YOUR MENU



By providing nutritious food, you can help your nursery stand out from the crowd, says Nigel Denby.

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# “We can learn a lot from business”

*By looking to the habits of successful organisations in other fields, nursery settings can benefit themselves and the wider early years sector, says **June O’Sullivan**...*

**B**usiness is one of the most powerful forces in society. Good businesses act in the interest of the common good. They are often described as values-led businesses and have a clear ethos that business has a responsibility to the people, which is integrated into all aspects of their vision, strategy and operating plan. This also makes good business sense, as just as consumers are loyal to companies whose values they share, employees who feel they are working for some higher purpose – as opposed to just trying to maximise the profits of the company they work for – are likely to be more productive.

The majority of nurseries are small or medium businesses, and I believe we need to collaborate more with the wider business world so we can learn good habits from their research, and other sectors can learn from us. Businesses are all too often insular, specialist and almost adversarial. We need to develop the idea that good nursery businesses are part of the national infrastructure. Good nurseries enable people to work, employ staff, help prepare children



***There are great similarities in the ways in which all businesses are made, run and sustained.***

for life, and play a part in how other businesses large and small develop family-friendly policies.

## **SHARED CHALLENGES**

Every business needs a strategy to set it on a winning streak. The strategy turns the business’s vision into reality. It’s about bringing in customers, bringing in enough money to meet your outgoings and ultimately generating a profit to ensure there is enough to pay shareholders (who may own the company) or for development. All businesses need to invest in improvement of staff and their service if they’re to remain successful. This is no different whether you run a small or a large business, or a social enterprise (which I do), where the profit is described as social impact.

There is therefore much to learn from those writing about businesses or researching ways of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of businesses. When I was writing *Successful Leadership in the Early Years*, I spent a great deal of time looking at non-childcare businesses, and the challenges we share. For example, the airlines and hotels have to understand occupancy as well as we do in childcare because occupancy, whether you are selling nursery places, seats on a plane or rooms in a hotel, is the key to keeping the business safe. That may seem a little shocking, but it helped me think through how I could develop a range of more flexible places for families – and once the core business is secure you can then pay much more attention to the quality of the service provided.

## **RETAINING STAFF**

I read a great deal of this business research to figure out how better to attract staff and improve induction,

which is the point where staff are most likely to leave whether they have joined a large corporate or a small nursery. A Harvard Business Review asked how committed were employees at any one time. They found that generally:

**33%** are “high risk” – that is, not committed to their present employer and not planning to stick around for the next two years;

**39%** are “trapped” – they aren’t committed to the organisation, but they are currently planning to stay for the next two years;

**24%** are “truly loyal” – both committed to the organisation and planning to stay on for at least two years.

Knowing this makes good business sense as it allows you to shape your recruitment strategy and then create a set of activities and support systems that are more likely to retain staff once you have recruited them. For a childcare business, where the biggest cost is staff, it makes sound financial sense to learn what troubles staff, why they don’t stay and what keeps them happy.

Knowledge is a great lever to intelligent business management. The CEEDA Workforce Report 2015 reported that 11% of staff were actively job hunting and 39% of staff had itchy feet, so let’s learn from the wider business community. Good organisations are constantly looking for ways to encourage and support staff, and most people want to be part of their organisation, want to know the organisation’s purpose and want to make a difference. How we nurture this can be learned both from within the early years sector but also





from those many talented people working in other businesses beyond its borders, often listed in publications such as *The Sunday Times* 'Best Companies to Work For' list.

## COPING WITH CHANGE

One of the continual challenges facing all businesses is managing change. Change is a messy business and, according to Michael Fullan, is 'rocket science' because it's so complex and we are so often given contradictory advice. According to the great writer of management theories Charles Handy, most organisations change only when they are frightened, when the costs of no change vastly exceed the risks. Nursery businesses are subject to massive change. Internally, we have to create staff teams able to change and meet the needs of new children and families, and external change is equally challenging as nurseries are also subject to the often short-term and poorly researched change requirements imposed by government policies. Good business leaders need to understand the theories of change, including the barriers to change and how to deal with them, and the levers of change and how to choose between them. It's all about culture and core values with leaders enthusing and encouraging a belief in their staff for the change.

Finally, good businesses are good at communication. People connect with those businesses and brands that tell their story. Many nursery business would benefit from better understanding these types of marketing skills, not just in terms of communicating their own business's unique selling point but also how the collective voice can help the early years sector create a narrative that explains the power of high-quality nurseries to the broader public.



*June O'Sullivan MBE is the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation. Visit [leyf.org.uk](http://leyf.org.uk), June's blog at*

***[juneosullivan.wordpress.com](http://juneosullivan.wordpress.com) or follow @JuneOSullivan***

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# “YOU’LL LOVE LEADING A NURSERY”

*Whether you’re a hands-on owner or a setting manager, you’re in a role in which you can make a real difference, says **James Hemsall...***

**W**hen I deliver early years leadership training, one of the first things I ask my learners about is how they became leaders. One of the most common answers is “By accident!” closely followed by “No one else would do it!” And it’s true – there are thousands of us in the sector who really had no concrete intention of working in early years, let alone leading a team or an organisation. Of course, there are also those for whom owning and leading a nursery is the culmination of a long-held ambition too – but funnily enough, regardless of our initial motivation, we all tend to agree that it’s lots of rewarding fun, combined with no shortage of challenges and plenty of learning along the way.

It’s been over 25 years since I started, and when asked to consider what leading in the early years sector has to recommend it, I reflected on where it all began. It was an exhilarating time for me – the early 90s, full of all the thrills of my early employment experiences, and the real sense that early years could change the world; and it really does have an impact – this is a sector that should gain more recognition for all the good work it does with children and families.

We’ve moved a long way since the 90s, but it’s still exciting work now. No matter whether you’re busy planning to open your first nursery, or reluctantly thinking about taking on a management role, this is a profession in which you can make a difference to children and their families. By sensitively using our skills and knowledge, words and gestures, and learning experiences and activities, we can help children and their parents know they are cared for, important and have great potential.

As leaders our role is something we do in partnership with families. We can model learning, and the promotion of best practice, equality and diversity.



**Leading in the early years will make you feel relevant and worthwhile.**

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We are one of the first services to meet families outside of health. That puts us in the unique position of being able to identify needs early, and play our part in

offering support or interventions that make a difference. Speaking personally, it’s that working collaboratively with partners at all levels that I’ve particularly enjoyed. It was such a battle in my early days when people didn’t know what early learning or childcare was. I literally had doors closed in my face. And now we are expected to fully participate, which is brilliant but not without its own challenges. And I think there are still battles to be had.

A key feature of leading in early years is that this is a ‘people business’. You will work with lots of inspiring children, amazing parents and families, and committed volunteers, staff and partners. Working in a team is a wonderful thing; it can be the best and most challenging aspect of the job at the same time. And when you have the privilege of leading a team, nothing can be more thrilling. It’s a real test of all your skills of matching the right action to the right moment, helping people grow and develop, whilst achieving the complex and

ever-changing balancing act of quality and business sustainability.

Leading in the early years will make you feel relevant and worthwhile. Every day you will see the difference you are making to parents, children and colleagues. You will have all sorts of options for how your career could take shape, in a role that gains more and more recognition every year. Who knows what direction it will take next for you and all of us?



*A former playworker and children’s centre manager, James Hemsall OBE is today director of*

*Hempsall’s training, research and consultancy. Visit [hempalls.com](http://hempalls.com) or follow [@jhemsall](https://twitter.com/jhemsall)*

**So you want to open a nursery?**

**([ow.ly/ePrH300ewHS](https://ow.ly/ePrH300ewHS))**

*"So many things were different back when I opened my first little 30-place setting at the age of 21!" - Angels at Play director Angela Spencer offers some words of warning for those thinking about opening a setting of their own.*

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*"Full-timers can present certain issues that don't occur with children who are brought in for two or three days a week." - Lorraine Jenkin looks at steps early years settings can take to ensure the wellbeing of their most regular attendees.*

**Doubling the free entitlement**

**([ow.ly/ZT5Bc](https://ow.ly/ZT5Bc))**

*"The Childcare Bill is very much welcomed by working families, but the sector is bracing itself, for there are many questions still to be answered." - PACEY's Liz Bayram on why government needs to take the early years profession seriously.*

**How to handle pushy parents**

**([ow.ly/Y9JOa](https://ow.ly/Y9JOa))**

*"Some parents are supportive but others struggle to understand why we use particular approaches, or why we have certain procedures in place." - Sue Cowley offers advice on working with challenging mums and dads.*

**Learning to be the boss**

**([ow.ly/VRvAP](https://ow.ly/VRvAP))**

*"We must be careful not to make leadership seem so hard that it becomes unattainable, something to leave to the superheroes." - June O'Sullivan MBE's take on the trials and tribulations of leading an early years setting.*

**Recruit male staff members**

**([ow.ly/GNdH300eykL](https://ow.ly/GNdH300eykL))**

*"Interaction with both male and female carers is a valuable experience for children, from birth onwards." - Toad Hall Nursery Group's Sophie Haylock on why the nursery sector needs more men.*



**D**are I mention the 'p' word? Sometimes it seems as though the nursery sector is ashamed of making money – that it feels the right approach is to focus on the children and the children alone, while the finances take care of themselves. But thinking about profit isn't mercenary; it's vital for any business, and a nursery is no exception. Ultimately, if your nursery doesn't make money, it doesn't operate; if it doesn't operate, it can't provide outstanding childcare, and when that happens, parents and families are the ones who lose out.

I am a director at Toybox Nursery (toyboxdenham.co.uk), a successful early years business. Since I joined the sector in 2005, my wife, Jackie, and I have built up and sold three thriving settings, and opened a fourth, judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Within 18 months of us opening the doors of this latest setting, the business was making a monthly profit and starting to repay the set-up costs and support the massive investment in quality we had made.

And investment is the key. We at Toybox are passionate about the nursery sector; we challenge convention at every turn to ensure our families have the chance to receive outstanding care and education. We aren't money-grabbing entrepreneurs focused on the bottom line for self-gain, but we are focused on making a profit to improve what we do.

For us, high quality and profitability are inextricably linked. Allow me to explain: we invest in our building and facilities; we invest in outstanding staff, rewarding those who excel through a system of performance-related pay; we invest in our processes and procedures. All of these things cost us money. But our investment creates and sustains



## “PROFIT IS NOT A DIRTY WORD”

*If your nursery doesn't make any money, it won't be providing an outstanding service, says Chris Townson...*

quality, and this leads to outstanding outcomes – when you have outstanding outcomes, you will have happy parents, willing to pay a little more for your services, and that leads to profit, our means to keep investing.

Unlike us, I sense that many nursery owners in this country are frightened to talk about profit for fear of being labelled greedy. Perhaps that shouldn't come as a surprise – the national press constantly runs stories about the rising cost of childcare. There is an implication – at best unchallenged by government – that all nurseries make thousands of pounds in profit, and it is their owners who make childcare expensive. They fail to mention that nearly half of all nurseries (49%) will make a loss, or breakeven at best, this year.

My belief is that the government sees that we are frightened to use the 'p word', and uses this fear to under-invest in childcare. It knowingly short-changes the sector because it believes nurseries will always strive to absorb their costs, while working for the best outcomes for children they can achieve. If that is true, it's time to rethink our attitude to profit, for the sector to demand better funding, so we can all operate at a better level.

Why not take the view that to be truly outstanding in every area, a nursery should have to be able to show significant profitability? In my opinion, if you can't do that, you will not be providing outstanding outcomes for long...

.....

**Chris Townson is a Director at Toybox Nursery and provides a sales consultancy service for the sector. Turn to page 49 to read his advice on setting your fees at the right level.**

## THE TOYBOX VIEW

### ON PROFIT

- ❖ **Accept your business must make a profit.**
- ❖ **Be proud that you are successful, as ultimately that is good for children and families.**
- ❖ **Have a clear, positive strategy to turn your budgets into reality.**

### ON INVESTMENT

- ❖ **Ignore the factors you can't control (e.g. government).**
- ❖ **Remember, the bigger the investment, the bigger the return.**
- ❖ **Don't asset-strip to make quick money – have a long-term plan.**
- ❖ **Pay your staff to be outstanding – don't reward mediocrity.**

### ON FEES

- ❖ **Charge parents according to your success – let the market economy dictate your fees.**
- ❖ **Make sure at all times that the value/ outcome you deliver outweighs the fees you charge. Remember, if your value/ outcome is zero, your fees will be less than zero!**
- ❖ **Listen to parents – they will be proud to send their children to a successful setting.**

## IMPORTANT NOTIFICATION TO ALL UK NURSERIES AND PRE-SCHOOL SETTINGS

This advertisement has been placed to promote Sun Safe Nurseries - a nationwide accreditation scheme developed by national skin cancer charity Skcin, to promote sun safety from an early age in order to reduce the soaring rates of skin cancer in the UK. Skcin are a non-profit making, charitable organisation who's primary objectives are to prevent the UK's most common cancer and save lives. The Sun Safe Nurseries national accreditation scheme is completely free and offers all pre-school settings a comprehensive range of fun and engaging, educational resources designed specifically to assist them in ensuring they provide a sun safe environment for the children in their care, whilst educating them on the importance of enjoying the sun safely.

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# ZERO TO 'OUTSTANDING'

*Steering your nursery to Ofsted's top grade will require lots of hard work, but our eight experts have words of wisdom that will set you on the road to success from day one...*

## "LISTEN TO YOUR CHILDREN"



**Listening to children's ideas and interests not only informs where their learning can go, but how you physically develop your setting. It fosters a shared sense of ownership and belonging. It also helps staff to clearly see learning that's happening right in front of them, instead of planning for a chunk of learning to happen to a child. When we really listen to our children the early educator's role becomes one of the most exciting and engaging on the planet!**

**Kirstine Beeley,**  
early years consultant



**Lead by good example and best practice.**

## "BE INCLUSIVE"



Outstanding settings strive to meet the needs of different people, creating an environment where everyone feels respected and valued, and can achieve their full potential. Inclusivity is the key to reducing the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. Make sure every child has an equal chance to participate, learn and develop, and can communicate in their preferred way. Activities should be led by the enthusiasm and interest of *all* children. They should feel valued as unique individuals and feel confident about their identity.

Children's attitudes towards diversity are affected by the behaviour of adults around them, so lead by good example and best practice. The environment and resources of a setting should reflect the diversity of those within it. Make everyone feel welcome in an appropriate way for them. Each child should feel valued and their parents respected as being an expert on their child.

**Purnima Tanuku OBE, Chief Executive, NDNA**

# “BE A STRONG LEADER”



Outstanding leaders are the ones who step away from their desks (if they have them) and are visible to their whole team, children and parents. They set an example to everyone around by constantly modelling best practice, and ensuring the whole setting is operating as it should be. It's a tall order, but the essential difference between 'managers who manage work' and 'leaders who lead people'.

Strong leaders create environments which are full of common goals and values that spread their influence, and where everyone uses positive power. Leaders should listen more than they talk. They should set out structures and lines of communication, and the team should be clear about all their responsibilities. Leaders, with the help of managers or coordinators, make sure these are all functioning and effective. Modelling the best ways of working at all times, the best leaders promote a safe and accountable environment – informed by their insatiable appetite for continuous professional development and the raising of early years quality and business standards.

**James Hemsall OBE,  
Director, Hemsall's  
training, research  
and consultancy**

# “DON'T FORGET CPD”

Early years is an ever-changing environment. Research continues to give new insights into how children learn and develop, and practice and the policy and regulatory environments are always evolving. Practitioners must continually review their skills and knowledge to remain up to date. Budget pressures have seen traditional classroom provision decline and practitioners are increasingly receiving their CPD online. This embracing of technology is welcome as it allows staff to learn at their own pace and at convenient times; however, practitioners must also have opportunities to share their knowledge and reflect on new information acquired. So alongside online courses, provide staff with a forum for discussing their learning to help keep them engaged and motivated.



**Michael Freeston, Director of Quality Improvement, Pre-school Learning Alliance**

# “ENGAGE WITH PARENTS”



**Forging solid relationships with parents is of huge benefit to the children in your care.**

**Parents are children's first and most enduring educators and it's important to recognise and respect that role. Your setting should be a home away from home, so sharing information, knowledge and understanding about children is vital. That knowledge helps you to meet the individual needs of each child, and encourages parents to value and respect your expertise. Involving parents from the very beginning, through induction, settling in and daily chats, sharing of resources, social events and information sessions, will help build a strong two-way relationship.**

**Liz Bayram, Chief Executive, PACEY**



***Your setting should be a home away from home.***





# "INVEST IN WELL-QUALIFIED STAFF"

## "BE REFLECTIVE"

**Reflecting on your team's work is essential if you're going to make improvements. Regular quality audits of practice with the children and the quality of written work (e.g. observations) can identify areas of good provision, as well as where improvement is required, as can peer observations. Mutual support and strong teamwork encourages practitioners to discuss areas for improvement, either formally in meetings or informally while working with the children. If you're looking for feedback about your own practice from staff, you may find the 'two stars and a wish' method - where two pieces of good practice are emphasised and one area for improvement identified - useful.**

**Kathy Brodie, early years consultant**



**Quality audits can identify where improvement is required.**



As early years providers, our greatest purpose is to uplift and inspire the next generation, and our people are at the heart of our efforts. Investing in dedicated, highly qualified professionals is the key to success - by doing so we're able to create teams who deliver meaningful learning experiences for each child. External validation also creates a benchmark in which families can have confidence and builds our reputation. Creating a culture of learning and development improves recruitment, retention and employee wellbeing, too - a competitive advantage!

**Gemma Pawson, Head of Early Years Workforce Development, Bright Horizons**

## "STAY SAFE"



When working with children, a strong understanding of safeguarding is paramount and should factor into all staff training on a regular basis. As employers we must ensure staff are given the knowledge and confidence to identify children at risk and raise the alarm through the appropriate channels. As practitioners, we must be able to demonstrate that we are taking appropriate measures to assess risks to the children in our care, whether that be in nursery, at home, or in the wider community. We must ensure all safeguarding arrangements take into account the policies and procedures of the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Keeping children safe at nursery is our primary concern, but we also have a duty to protect them when they are not in our care. The only way we can do this is through forging strong partnerships with our children's families, communities and external agencies where necessary.

**Lisa Snell, Director of Early Years, Busy Bees Childcare**





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# Sharing knowledge

*If you want to improve your team's practice, there's no sense going it alone – there's a wealth of support available from the sector, says **Fiona Webb**...*

**S**haring good practice is essential if early years settings are to maximise outcomes for the children in their care. Most nursery groups will routinely share ideas and best practice internally between their settings, and at Sunny Days we do this on a daily basis. However, it's often through networking with professionals from other settings that the biggest improvements are made.

## EXTERNAL TRAINING

There are many different opportunities to network and share good practice. At Sunny Days we encourage all our practitioners to attend external training courses of their choice. These courses offer the opportunity

for group work, brainstorming and idea sharing, and the trainers have a wealth of knowledge to share. I stress to my practitioners that their attendance on the course isn't complete until they have shared their learning with the rest of the team, either at our training sessions or staff meetings. Recently a training session on British Values led us to introduce a 'democratic' voting system for favourite preschool snacks, which we've copied across our settings. External trainers and consultants running courses advertise on local council children's services websites and on professional body websites (e.g. [neytco.co.uk](http://neytco.co.uk)), and are well worth attending.

Children's services meetings can also be a good source of ideas. My managers attend 'transition' meetings, held with Reception teachers, to develop a smooth transition from preschool to school, and have picked up plenty of ideas. It is worth asking your children's services department for information about the meetings you can attend.

## VISITING HOURS

I have found it very useful to attend early years conferences and seminars. I've learned a great deal from the speakers, from visiting the trade stalls and also from the other professionals I've met there. At a recent conference in London I chatted with the person next to me whilst we waited for a speaker to start and within five minutes we had swapped some really useful ideas on how to meet the communication needs of multilingual children! The events are advertised in

professional magazines, most are free and are well worth attending.

Meeting other owner/managers at conferences has also given me the confidence to visit other settings. It may feel uncomfortable visiting other nurseries on your 'patch', but very often settings outside the immediate area are happy to accept visitors. Organisations such as Neytco publish a list of those happy to take visits, and some settings host networking meetings. I've picked up some very good ideas from these meetings and, as importantly, it has been very reassuring to discover that others are having the same issues and difficulties that I am.

## LOOK ONLINE

It's worth remembering that you don't always have to physically travel to share ideas and good practice. The internet is full of informative blogs and I've found it well worth following key Twitter hashtags such as #EYTalking, #childcare or #earlyyears. I would also strongly advise joining any Facebook groups in your area that are set up to support early years practitioners.

Finally, and very importantly, it's very useful to engage with professional bodies and benefit from the support and advice they offer. A good example is National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) and specifically the local networking groups they have set up with the aim of bringing together owners/managers to give them the opportunity to share experiences and discuss concerns around business growth, development and sustainability. The South West and Swindon NDNA area networking meeting is an excellent forum for this; it's positive, supportive and based around a central idea of information sharing.

Looking externally for support is refreshing and reassuring. It's a source of excellent ideas and will help you realise that you're not the only person experiencing issues and concerns. It's well worth doing – the help is there.



*Fiona Webb is an EYP and Managing Director of Sunny Days Children's Nursery.*



***It's often through networking with other settings that the biggest improvements are made.***

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# An inspector calls...



*An Ofsted inspection is an important event for any nursery, but it needn't be a stressful one, if you and your staff are prepared, says*  
**Theresa Johnson...**

**F**eeling anxious about an impending Ofsted inspection is completely normal, but the anticipation is usually worse than the actual event. All inspectors *should* put you at ease from the very beginning; after all it's your opportunity to showcase your hard work. They are there to see what you do well, and to ensure that the children in your care are safe, secure and making suitable progress. However, it's important that you and your team are prepared, to ensure you can present your setting at its best...

## INVOLVE EVERYONE

Call a staff meeting to talk through the inspection process. Share the *Early Years Inspection Handbook* and *Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings* (Ofsted, August 2015). Does your setting have a clear vision and mission that is shared and known by all staff and parents? Revisit your last inspection report and remind staff of any previous actions and recommendations so they are focused.

Talk to the children and their parents so they know what to expect, too. The inspector is likely to want to talk to them about their experience of your setting, and it's helpful if parents understand what the inspection is for and why aiming for 'outstanding' is so important to you. Keep a display folder of all the cards, letters and emails you receive from parents – even

Christmas cards that say "Thank you for all you have done this year". All feedback is important.

## USE YOUR SEF

The Ofsted self-evaluation form (SEF) is most effective when used as a continuous reflective tool. Ofsted can look at this before their visit to really get a picture of the setting before they arrive. Make sure you capture the thoughts and feelings of children and parents. Training certificates and a CPD log alongside identifying the impact of the training demonstrates your setting's commitment to staff development.

## ADVANCE WARNING

In a group provision you will *normally* receive a call at, or just after, midday, on the working day before the inspection. Have you kept Ofsted up to date with any changes in telephone numbers? If the provider or their representative isn't available, the inspector will ask to speak to the most senior member of staff. The call shouldn't be excessively long and will focus on arrangements for



Theresa Johnson is Development Manager at the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY).



## QUESTION TIME

**THE INSPECTOR WILL WANT TO BUILD UP A PICTURE OF YOUR SETTING, AND WILL OBSERVE PRACTITIONERS INTERACTING WITH THE CHILDREN WHERE POSSIBLE. HELP EASE STAFF ANXIETY BY DISCUSSING QUESTIONS THEY MAY BE ASKED...**

- ❖ **What are your responsibilities with regard to ensuring the EYFS statutory requirements are met?**
- ❖ **How do you ensure that the safeguarding and welfare requirements are met?**
- ❖ **How do you plan and prepare for a child to join the setting?**
- ❖ **How do you monitor the progress of individual children and plan for their developmental needs from day one?**
- ❖ **What is the ethos or vision of the setting and targets to improve?**
- ❖ **How do you support parents in helping children's learning at home?**
- ❖ **What strategies do you have to involve parents in children's learning and development at the setting?**

inspection, the children you have attending, inspection activities and allowing time for paperwork to be ready. Make sure your staff are prepared to take this call.

### SHOW YOUR EXPERTISE

An Ofsted visit shouldn't create panic. If your setting is delivering a high-quality service to the children and families in your care then it's about getting everything in order, taking a deep breath and showcasing your expertise!

All staff should have an excellent knowledge of the EYFS and be aware of the judgements that Ofsted will be gathering evidence of. Take each judgement in turn and think about how you will meet them – for example, under 'leadership and management' think about the experience of staff across the age ranges, how you have used any additional funding to support individual children and how children are safeguarded effectively. Are you aware of the Prevent Duty and able to demonstrate how British Values are integral to your practice?

Ofsted will want to see how staff interact with children and, in particular, the many ways in which they support their natural curiosity to learn.

### ON THE DAY

Encourage staff to stay calm – being relaxed will ensure they're at their most natural, and able to demonstrate their good practice. Try not to let the inspector's presence affect the way your team work with the children.

### TAKE CONTROL

Don't be afraid to request the inspector's ID and ask them to sign the visitors' book; they might be an Ofsted inspector, but they're still a visitor to your setting and you should stick to your child protection procedures. And don't be afraid to challenge them, or explain exactly why you do something the way you do it. If it works for your setting, show them why!

When the inspector arrives, they will emphasise that you continue with your normal routine. The inspector wants to see what you do well. The inspector will negotiate and agree a timetable of how the inspection will take place. They will want to talk to any parents of children who attend your provision. They will ask that you show them around the areas of the provision that children use.

### TRACKING CHILDREN

The inspector needs to see that all children are making suitable progress in

your setting. To do this, they will track a child or two by examining any documentation, from when the child first starts with you, to the present day. The inspector will spend approximately 80% of the inspection time observing staff and the children during learning activities, play and daily care routines.

### JOINT OBSERVATIONS

The inspector may invite you to participate in a joint observation of activities, care routines and/or scrutiny of the progress children make. You don't have to accept this invitation and in some cases, it may not be appropriate or convenient.

The purpose of a joint observation is to enable the inspector to gain an insight into the effectiveness of the provision's professional development programme. It can also provide an effective assessment of the quality of the provider's monitoring and evaluation of practice.

## GET SUPPORT

**PACEY HAS A HOST OF RESOURCES TO SUPPORT NURSERIES PREPARING FOR INSPECTION...**

- ❖ **Spotlight on: The Common Inspection Framework –** [pacey.org.uk/cif](http://pacey.org.uk/cif)
- ❖ **The Common Inspection Framework, British values and you –** [ow.ly/ZYcx3000DL3](http://ow.ly/ZYcx3000DL3)
- ❖ **Spotlight on: British values and the Prevent duty –** [ow.ly/8RxO3000Dxt](http://ow.ly/8RxO3000Dxt)
- ❖ **Fundamental British values in the early years –** [ow.ly/A2SN3000DCr](http://ow.ly/A2SN3000DCr)
- ❖ **Free Ofsted webinar with PACEY –** [ow.ly/92Lt3000Dvx](http://ow.ly/92Lt3000Dvx)

**For more information, or to become a member, visit [pacey.org.uk](http://pacey.org.uk)**





# A place to perform

**A**s part of its 'Learning Rooms' approach, Gratnells, the manufacturer and marketer of 'Stage' modular systems, is offering nurseries a variety of mini staging formats that can be easily used and stored.

Learning Rooms is a concept that seeks to promote the abilities of every child, whether academic, creative or practical. A vital part of this process involves giving children a platform on which to present, display and share their abilities. The introduction of 'Step-up' mini staging modules makes this easy, with an in-classroom unit that offers visibility and a presentation platform. Several classroom packs can be consolidated into a bigger format when a major production is planned.

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Richard Picking, International Marketing Director for Gratnells, says that 'Step-up' has the potential to help develop children's self-confidence, self-esteem and

*Gratnells' 'Step-up' mini stage systems can turn any space into an auditorium...*



communication skills. "With a mini-stage that can be used every day and stored in a corner of the classroom, teachers can let every child experience the thrill of being a celebrity in front of their peers," he says. "It really doesn't matter what the skill on show is – it can be something relatively passive like displaying a piece of outstanding artwork, or a vibrant performance of a musical solo piece. The point is that 'Step-up' provides a focal point to recognise and reward good work in all its forms. Teachers can stage impromptu events as easily as planned ones, and the familiarity of the unit permanently in the classroom helps overcome any anxiety for the child."

'Step-ups' are easy to assemble and breakdown, and feature a quality finish wood surface and robust plastics for weight reduction and durability. The range of modules includes steps, pelmets and rails. Three versions are available: 'Step-up' Mini Stage (£199), 'Step-up' Podium (£299) and 'Step-up' Quad Mini Stage (£399, pictured).

Visit [gratnellsstage.com](http://gratnellsstage.com) for full details.

## 'Step-up' in self confidence

Stand head and shoulders above the class with the 'Step-up' mini stage system

From an early age, participation and presentation in groups builds a child's self confidence and helps them reach their full learning potential.

Whether it's sharing stories, show and tell, celebrating achievement or even an impromptu performance, the Gratnells 'Step-up' mini stage makes the moment special.

- Strong and sturdy
- .30m high with single step
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- Easily assembled and stored
- Links with other Gratnells stage units



Step-up mini stage  
.75m x .75m x .30m high complete kit

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Step-up podium  
.75m x 2.25m x .45m high complete kit

'Step-up' podium kit only  
**£299**



Step-up quad mini stage  
1.5m x 1.5m x .30m high complete kit

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**Gratnells** **STAGE**

# “Help us to improve”

*Employing a consultant to help you develop your nursery can lead to outstanding results – just make sure you choose the right person, says **Kathy Brodie**...*

**C**hoosing to bring someone from outside your nursery in to help you improve is a huge decision. After all, you are the person best placed to know all about your setting, practitioners and parents. However, there are times when a specialist early years consultant will be the best person to help and support you.

This could be because your practitioners need to know about specialist areas SEN (special educational needs), information that can only be provided by an expert. Or it may be that everyone needs an update on new legislation, such as British Values, and the quickest way to do this is to have a consultant work in the setting so you can be sure your practitioners understand the implications for practice.

A consultant can give a valuable external perspective on problems that you are grappling with. Sometimes just being able to stand back and see things from a different angle can make all the difference.

It may also be that advice from an ‘outsider’ is listened to more closely (even if you have been saying something similar for a long time!).

Finally, a consultant is often the catalyst for change. Practitioners know that you are serious about implementing improvements because you are paying for an expert’s services.

So, how do you choose a consultant who will understand and meet your needs?

## **DO YOUR RESEARCH**

Ensure that your consultant’s perspective matches your own ethos or philosophy, for example, an emphasis on the outdoors. You can determine this from the information on his or her website, Facebook page or advertising material. Read any articles, blogs or books that the consultant has written on the subject area, to check for subject knowledge and expertise. Check especially for how easily you understand the points being made, as this is likely to reflect whether you will understand the consultant’s advice



when you do meet face to face.

Depending on your requirements, the specialist knowledge or level of qualifications that the consultant has can be important. For example, it might be critical that you source specialist, in-depth speech and language expertise. Therefore, it makes sense to research the exact qualifications that the consultant has to make sure they match your needs.

Ideally, you should see your consultant talk first, at a seminar or other training event, to see if the style of delivery and interaction will suit your practitioners.

## **COMMUNICATION IS VITAL**

It will be useful for the consultant if you can give as much information as possible about the improvements you’d like to see, or the desired outcome of the project you have planned. The most useful information you can give is about the courses and training that your practitioners have

## **SUCCESSFUL SUPPORT**

### **FIVE THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN SOURCING A CONSULTANT...**

- 1 Make sure your consultant’s perspective matches your own ethos or philosophy.**
- 2 What specialist knowledge or qualifications does your consultant have – do they meet your needs?**
- 3 Give your consultant as much information as possible about what you want to achieve.**
- 4 Make sure you agree payment before your consultant starts work!**
- 5 Put a plan in place to sustain the improvements your consultant helps you to achieve.**





***A consultant is often the catalyst for change; practitioners know that you're serious when you are paying for an expert's services.***

help and advise you on this.

It is essential that both you and the consultant have the same expectations about the scope of the project. Ideally, this needs to be recorded clearly in writing before the consultant starts. This helps ensure that you have a consultant who can meet your expectations, that a realistic price can be agreed and that time scales can be met.

## **SUSTAINING IMPROVEMENT**

After the initial excitement and newness of consultancy collaboration has dissipated, it is very easy to slip back into old habits. Sustaining improvements already made will be the next challenge. It may be helpful to draw up an action plan with your consultant before the end of the project, so everyone knows that the consultancy is just the beginning of an ongoing journey. This can then be added to and extended as practice improves.



*Kathy Brodie is a consultant and author, specialising in the Early Years Foundation Stage and special educational needs. For more information, visit **kathybrodie.com***

already attended, so the consultant can ensure the joint work is at a suitable level – there is no point the consultant preparing for Level 3 practitioners if the majority of them are at Level 6! This may also affect whether the consultant feels comfortable working at the level that you need.

### **Know what you need**

The start of the conversation with your consultant will be about your unique needs. Even if you only have a vague idea of the type of improvements you would like to see, you can discuss these together. It could be that the experience that the consultant has will mean he or she can identify other areas that it may be preferable to start with, or break down the consultancy into more achievable stages.

Be sure to ask about previous projects or experience; this enables the consultant to demonstrate previous successes and allows you to assess whether this will meet your requirements – for example,

if the consultant has done a lot of work with children's centres, or has worked extensively with Reception-aged children, and how this matches your situation.

The type and delivery of the consultancy should be discussed. For example, you may require a report or a final day's training. Some consultants may do this for a separate fee while others will cost the whole project

### **Agree payment**

Payment structure for the project must be agreed. For example, some consultants will request a deposit before starting work, which may be a major consideration if you aim to pay after claiming money back for CPD from the local authority. It is worthwhile checking to see if VAT, travel and expenses are included in the cost quoted, so there are no surprises afterwards! If the initial cost is more than you expected, do go back and see if you can split the project into smaller, more manageable pieces. Many consultants will

# GROWING BUSY BEES

*Even the most successful businesses had to start somewhere, as Marg Randles, Managing Director of the UK's largest nursery provider, knows very well...*

**I**f you are already familiar with the early years sector, you will no doubt have heard of Marg Randles. Co-founder and managing director of Busy Bees, she has played a pivotal role in the establishment and development of what is one of the sector's most successful childcare businesses, throughout the last 35 years. What you may not know is the story behind the success...

Marg knew from a very early age that she wanted to teach, and duly embarked on a career in education. But in 1983 she, her husband and four friends (all teachers) recognised an unmet demand for high-quality childcare while searching for places for their own children. Over a pub lunch they devised a solution, which was penned out on the back of a beer mat, and Busy Bees was born. The Randles and Woodward sold their homes to purchase their first nursery in 1984, sharing the living space above for four years. They were determined to provide quality care and maintained a strong belief that it would work. Fortunately, it did. Now, as managing director, Marg is currently responsible for 257 nurseries, a school

and two children centres in the UK, and 62 settings in South East Asia. Over the last three decades Marg has touched the lives of over a million children and in 2015 was presented with an OBE for her outstanding services to children and families in the UK.

"We wouldn't have one nursery, let alone 257, if it wasn't for the exceptional people we have in the company who deliver amazing opportunities to children every day," Marg says. "Many of my colleagues and supporters have become lifelong friends, and I thank them for their loyalty and commitment over the years.

"From the very beginning when we opened up our first nursery, our desire was to create amazing opportunities for children and we believe, vehemently, every child in our care should receive the same quality provision that we demanded for our own children.

"As teachers, we had very little money when we first set out, but thanks to the Cooperative Bank, who believed in us throughout, we finally managed to secure a loan. We have always had (and still do have) formidable focus, energy and the necessary level of aspiration to overcome adversity. Having sold our homes, we poured every penny into the business and literally had no choice but to make it a success. It was not always plain sailing. The 1989 property slump put us in negative equity and we simply couldn't service the debt. To secure the sustainability of the business we made a very difficult decision to remodel the business, moving it from one dependent on residential property values to a nursery management model dependent on fees from major national employers.

"Although the early years were fraught with financial risk (no profits for three years, a huge bank loan and the aforementioned property slump) it was a magical time. There were moments of frustration due to government/policy changes and pressures beyond our

control, but we realised we had enough support and tenacity to find a solution. As a company we have an ability to solve problems, learn from mistakes, and empower like-minded souls, which has certainly contributed to our success. In 1984 our blueprint was set and, through innovation, experience, expertise and acquisition, myself and co-founder John Woodward are now custodians of a national and international network of local, quality nurseries with plans for extensive growth here and overseas over the next three years."

## SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

"Back in 1990 Busy Bees National Support Centre (with experts in Childcare, Catering, HR, Marketing & PR, Estates, Finance & IT) was born out of a desire to keep Busy Bees at the forefront of innovative quality childcare and expansion plans. A brand is a promise and we are committed to keeping our promise throughout every acquisition. Sensible policies, procedures and robust recruitment plans have enabled us to achieve a sustainable business model and growth.

"Staff are undoubtedly key to our success. Therefore, we prioritise recruitment and training, and offer career development opportunities to those that understand and embody our ethos. Our HR and Training departments ensure we have a content and experienced workforce, and a pipeline of talent ready as we grow. We were the first childcare company to become Investors in People (circa 1990) and our 'grow your own' mantra has proved triumphant, with many staff celebrating over 20 years with us. As we have climbed the career ladder, so have apprentices risen to room managers, nursery managers, regional directors and divisional directors. Nothing gives me more pleasure than watching a devoted and talented member of staff reach their career goals, especially when they can nurture up-and-coming staff and become our perfect role models. Now members of the 5% apprenticeship club, we are set on eradicating the negative perceptions around choosing childcare as a career, challenging the whole 'hair or care' ethos that it's only fit for those who struggle academically.

"The majority of our surplus is ploughed back into our buildings or to acquire new nurseries. Our children's safety is paramount. Our Estates department also



***We poured every penny into the business and literally had no choice but to make it a success.***





ensure we are providing nurturing, challenging and inspirational spaces for every age and stage of our children's development. Regular internal audits and enhancements help create state-of-the-art sites with over 96% rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted."

## GIVING BACK

"Busy Bees was founded on a bedrock of nurture and innovation, and we continue to spend our time finding ways of making the lives of our families, children and staff teams better. As a company, we believe in giving back. To date Busy Bees has supported over 100 children's charities, generating over a £1m of funds for vital causes. Working alongside community health visitors, up and down the country, we offer free provision for children in need of emergency care. We also set up our own Busy Bees Foundation, which provides financial support to Busy Bees' families coping with difficulties such as bereavement, ill health and separation.

"I believe it is our duty to find ways of creating an open dialogue between parents, practitioners, industry leaders and policy-makers. We work with government and leadership groups, and are happy to dedicate time debating and resolving industry issues when required.

"Our future will depend on continuing to find the right people and nurturing the talent we have in place. It will also depend on continuing to deliver top-quality care and making it affordable for parents. Our plans are to continue expanding through group acquisitions and new site developments in the UK and across the world. We will continue to develop our offering and try new things, and we will continue to share experiences and best practice across the sector to ensure we are all working towards making the world a better place for our children to flourish."

**Visit [busybees.com](http://busybees.com)**

# Here to help

*Whatever you have planned for your nursery business, the TTS team are ready to support you...*

## WHAT'S YOUR NEXT PROJECT?

- ❖ A new room for two-year-olds
- ❖ Opening a new setting
- ❖ Improving your outdoor area
- ❖ A new build or extension
- ❖ Updating your EYFS curriculum resources
- ❖ Any other major resource project?

Whatever your answer, our team have the experience to work to your time constraints and ensure the whole process runs as smoothly as possible. Your TTS account manager will visit you in your setting and come up with a plan to help you save time and money, ensuring your order is managed to suit your delivery requirements.

## WHAT WE OFFER

**A dedicated team** who look after set-ups and refurbishments, offering a personal and friendly service, on hand to deal with any enquiries and queries.

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**A resources check list** – room by room, by area of learning, designed to make your life easier.

**Early years expertise** – we are able to advise on learning environments and appropriate resources for the EYFS.

**Bulk order discounts** – for orders quoted and placed through your dedicated account manager

## WHAT MAKES US SPECIAL?

### Safety

We know that this is paramount and here at TTS, we take it very seriously. We follow stringent testing procedures. Look out for the age certification on each resource.

### Innovation

We take great pride in developing practitioners' ideas into innovative



resources. Many of our resources have won awards. We manufacture items from all over the world, seeking the best materials and techniques. We want resources that are unique, to inspire and ignite young minds.

### Open-ended learning

Versatile resources are essential. The child decides how to develop the play and initiates the ideas. A well-designed resource will provide a rich variety of learning opportunities.

### Support

We're here to help. We have an in-house educationalist and work in partnership with practitioners in all areas of early years education. Our own developed resources have detailed notes and ideas suggesting practical ways to support children's learning.

### Quality

Practitioners want resources that are robust and able to withstand the pressure of lots of children playing with them, day in, day out. We've also worked hard to provide beautiful resources with lovely textures and finishes. Just one example is the wooden collection with its satin smooth finish – and what's more, the resources smell great too!

### Developmentally aligned resources

We know that each child is unique and develops at their own rate. Child

development is at the centre of what we do. We reflect on how a baby's needs are different from those of a one-year-old and how resources and provision needs to reflect that. We consider how the children access their knowledge and understanding through repeated patterns of behaviour and first-hand experiences.

## WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY...

*"The TTS Nursery Set-Up Team made the whole process of equipping our new nursery easy and were always on hand to*

*offer advice and deal with any queries we had. A friendly and professional service!"*

**Kay Scott, Kenyngton Manor Primary School**

*"TTS is a fantastic company to deal with. They understand our needs and urgency to 'get things done', make you feel you are a valued customer and seem to go that extra mile. Fantastic people and great service, and I would have no hesitation in recommending them."*

**Heather Palmer, Ovenden Private Day Nursery & Scarlett Heights Day Nursery**

*"Thank you, TTS, for your support and advice to resource our new two-year-old provision. Our two-year-olds are now busy enjoying endless possibilities in their play and learning, and the robust resources are withstanding the challenge of daily use!"*

**Jane Carpenter, Little Green Day Nursery**

**To find out more about how TTS can help you, call 01623 688509 or email [lhedges@tts-group.co.uk](mailto:lhedges@tts-group.co.uk)**







# Your first steps

If you're starting out in the nursery sector, you'll have a lot to think about. This handy guide from **Deborah Robinson** will ensure you don't forget anything important...

**S**tarting your own nursery can be very rewarding, but it's also challenging, even for someone already working in the sector. The solution? Make sure you plan carefully at every stage of the process...

## IS IT FEASIBLE?

As part of the feasibility stage, carry out your market research. Is there a need for another nursery? Think about customers, competitors, operations and local market conditions. Write a thorough SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and PEST (political, economical, social, technological) analysis of your proposed business.

## CONTACT YOUR L.A.

Get in touch with your local authority early years team, who will be in charge of childcare provision in your area. Look at their Childcare Sufficiency Assessment. They will be aware of other nurseries planning to open shortly. They can also offer advice about local funding and support. Many local authorities have a business support advisor, who can offer you additional help.



**Carry out an annual business health check to ensure that your business is sustainable.**

## ON THE PREMISES

Once you have found a property, you need the relevant consents from planning, fire and environmental health departments. Is this premises fit for purpose? Speak to your local planning office before committing yourself.

## BUSINESS PLANNING

Estimate your costs – think about start-up costs (purchasing or leasing the building, equipping it, recruitment and marketing) and also running costs (staffing bill, utilities, insurance, resources and food). These delivery costs along with your market research will help you to set your fee levels and write your business plan. NDNA has business plan templates to assist this process.

Most new businesses will need to raise finance. Can you invest money into the business? Where will you get the balance from – e.g. bank loans, start-up loans, equity funding or grants.

Decide your business structure – will you be a sole trader, limited company or run by management committee? Contact Companies House for information.

If you are buying an existing nursery premises, undertake due diligence and seek professional advice. Will you need to change or adapt it? Would that require further permission, and how will that affect

your planned timescales?

## REMEMBER TO REGISTER

You will need to register with the appropriate regulatory body and comply with their legal standards. The registration process can take up to 25 weeks to complete, so you will need to build this into your plan. It will include a pre-registration visit.

Nurseries in England must register with Ofsted and comply with the Early Years Foundation Stage. Scottish settings should contact the Care Inspectorate and comply with National Care Standards. In Wales, settings need to register with Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, and comply with the National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare for children up to the age of 12 years and associated regulations.

## PREPARING FOR OFSTED

During your registration visit you will need to demonstrate the criteria set out in your regulatory body's registration guide. Your first job will be recruiting your staff. Aim to get the best people for the job so you can provide the highest quality care and education. Make sure they have full and relevant qualifications. You will need to carry out a DBS check for all staff and meet necessary staff:child ratios. Check your regulatory framework on issues such as first aid qualifications.

**NDNA has a factsheet and a more in-depth step-by-step guide, *Starting Your Nursery*, for prospective nursery owners in its online shop. Visit [ndna.org.uk](http://ndna.org.uk). For more support, call 01484 407 070 or email [info@ndna.org.uk](mailto:info@ndna.org.uk)**



Deborah Robinson  
is Business Support  
Manager at NDNA.



# LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

***Peers Carter** set up and ran a successful day nursery for more than a decade – what would be his advice to someone thinking of embarking on such a venture today?*

“Love  
what  
you do”



Do not enter the field as an operator unless you really like and care about children. The parents, the staff and the children can feel the difference between someone who just wants to make money and someone who is committed to creating a happy, safe and creative environment. (My wife and I set up our day nursery because we did not think any of the local providers were good enough for our grandchildren.) This is a very emotional business – nothing matters more to sane parents than their children, and everything you do will be under the microscope.

Will the level of care you provide pass muster and delight? Will parents be likely to recommend you – or do the opposite?

“Assess your  
competition”

Go and visit as many day nurseries as you can before you start. Every nursery will teach you something. For example, what does your nose say to you when you come in through the door? How are you greeted by staff? Are the children happy and occupied, or listless and bored? What equipment does the nursery have on display, and is it actually used? The more research you can do first, the better; not doing that research can be very costly.

“BUY BIG”

**Establish the largest registration you can afford from the outset. In my view, day nurseries with registrations of less than 50 places are at risk except in the most affluent areas, where as often as not vouchers for ‘free’ childcare hours are not accepted. With 15 hours of ‘free’ childcare producing a loss and the government’s proposed 30 hours producing twice that loss, a day nursery has to be of a certain size and occupancy to survive those losses and thrive.**







## “CONSIDER YOUR COSTS”

**Make sure your property costs will be reasonable and controllable. An old building that needs constant unpredictable repairs will always be a threat to the viability of your business. If at all possible, begin with a really well restored or modern building that will not need constant care and supervision... like the children!**

### “Give it some thought”

Think twice about doing it. It is risky and all-consuming of your time, energy and emotion. If you are determined to go ahead, check out the level of local demand very carefully. Are the other local day nurseries all full or nearly full? (They should be.) Are any of them providing a less than stellar service? Is there an opportunity to do better? What do their customers say about them and the atmosphere of their settings? Do not rush into starting a new day nursery until you are absolutely certain that there will be strong demand from a clientèle who will be able to meet the costs reliably.



**DANGER**

## “Prepare for the worst”

**HAVE A REALISTIC OR EVEN PESSIMISTIC BUSINESS PLAN. DO NOT PRODUCE AN OPTIMISTIC BUSINESS PLAN JUST TO RAISE FINANCE FROM YOUR BANK. THEY MAY HOLD YOU TO IT. IF YOU THEN CANNOT MEET YOUR ASPIRATIONS AND PROMISES, YOU WILL BE IN TROUBLE EARLY ON. BEST TO PLAN FOR A SLOW LAUNCH AND A FEW ROCKY PATCHES. THEN IF THINGS GO WELL, IT WILL BE HAPPY SURPRISES ALL DAY LONG.**

*Peers Carter founded The School Transfer Company ([schooltransfer.co.uk](http://schooltransfer.co.uk)), the leading confidential broker for Day Nurseries and the Independent Educational Sector. He and his wife, Susan, owned and ran Bronte Day Nursery and Bronte Prep School in Gravesend. Email [peers@schooltransfer.co.uk](mailto:peers@schooltransfer.co.uk)*

# “We want it to be perfect”

*When Elena Mackey and Rachel Munro Peebles decided to open a nursery, they were determined to create a setting like no other, as Nursery Business discovered...*

**E**lena Mackey and Rachel Munro Peebles aren't obvious business partners. Look at their backgrounds and you'll find little to link them. In a wide-ranging career, Elena has spent 20 years living in the Middle East working for the likes of Citibank, acquired a degree in business and studied childcare, counselling and Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Rachel, by contrast, is a graduate of the Chelsea School of Art, a former PR girl for Harvey Nichols, and runs a property development business based in Shoreditch. But a chance meeting at the school gates has led them to the early years sector, and a particularly ambitious take on the traditional nursery model.

For both nursery ownership is a fresh challenge – a vocation in which they are still finding their feet – but unfamiliarity hasn't diluted their vision, or dampened their determination to offer local parents and their children the best early years education and care. Their setting, the 45-place Fount Nursery in Hackney ([fountnursery.com](http://fountnursery.com)), is like no other you'll have seen before: boasting a unique

vintage-inspired interior, situated in an arch under a railway bridge, neighboured by a slow-cooking Northern Italian restaurant and deli, set at the heart of lifestyle family destination Fount London ([fountlondon.com](http://fountlondon.com)), for which the partnership is also responsible. There have been challenges aplenty to overcome in the six months since it opened its doors, but with places filling up fast, Elena and Rachel are confident in their formula, and are already planning for the future.

## EAT, SHOP, PLAY

“I moved to the area three-and-a-half years ago,” Elena says, as we sit down in Il Cudega, the aforementioned Italian restaurant, to talk about Fount London's beginnings. “Rachel was the first mum I met in the playground at our daughters' school. I just went over and said, ‘Hi, I'm new – I think our two girls are in the same class.’ We had a coffee here, a coffee there, talked about what we wanted, what we do. And then this all evolved.”

“Elena wanted to open a nursery and had come across this site,” Rachel explains. “When she showed it to me I thought it was amazing. I'd had this family destination concept in mind for years, a place for parents to meet, somewhere we could create a sense of community. I suggested we take on the three arches there are here, and the space outside.” And just like that, Fount London was born.

Their vision for Fount London is encapsulated in its ‘Eat, Play, Shop’ tag-line: alongside Il Cudega and Fount Nursery there's a pop-up shop space, occupied on a rotating basis by local businesses. “The idea is that parents can drop their children off, buy something in the pop-ups, and then sit down for some



food and coffee,” Rachel says. “Fount London is the mother of the project, and Fount Nursery is the heart – that's how we see it.”

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Elena's desire to open a nursery stemmed from a recognition that local parents were struggling to find the high-quality early years provision they needed to return to work. “I listened to mums, spoke to them at my daughter's school,” she says. “I realised there was a huge lack of childcare, and that most of what was available wasn't good.”

For Rachel, that was a familiar story: “When I was looking for childcare, the places I went to, you just wouldn't have put your children in,” she says. “We decided we weren't going to cut corners, and that we would deliver something that was true to parents in Hackney.”

This meant creating an environment, and an atmosphere, in tune with parents' sensibilities, as well as one that



**Running your own business is really difficult – you have to eat, sleep and breathe it.**





supported children's learning. While you should never judge a book by its cover, or a nursery by its aesthetics alone, it's impossible not to be impressed by Fount Nursery's interior. Its open-plan layout, palette of natural colours and selection of vintage furniture and resources manages simultaneously to be both calming and stimulating to children, and appealing to mums and dads. "When Elena said she wanted to open a nursery, I said, 'I'll deliver you something completely unique,'" Rachel tells us. "Hackney has an amazing diversity – we have creatives, writers, artists, bankers, and in their houses they have an eclectic mix of antiques and modern art, and that's what we've replicated. We've also steered away from bright colours as much as we can – children don't like them, so why do nurseries use them?"

The result of Rachel's efforts affords Fount an instantly recognisable point of difference to its competition, too, a point that isn't lost on its owners: "With the

interior, with our brand, we're trying to create our own niche within the nursery sector," Rachel sums up their thinking.

## WAITING FOR OFSTED

Opening a nursery is never a simple undertaking, and the challenge is amplified if you have never done it before. Even having invested in ongoing support from well-respected consultant Laura Henry (laurahenryconsultancy.com), Elena and Rachel have encountered pitfalls, which they've hurdled with varying degrees of success. The most frustrating, and costly, of these appeared just as Fount Nursery was ready to open its doors, as Ofsted's mandatory registration visit failed to materialise.

"They could have come in at any time – they have 25 weeks to do the registration visit after you complete the application," Elena explains. "Everybody was telling us 'they'll be with you really

## ON GETTING PLANNING PERMISSION...

**"The arches had just been renovated when we acquired them – prior to that they'd been garages," Rachel explains. "But we were delayed by a year, because they were B1 units and planning didn't want to lose the office space. We literally went down to Hackney Council, stood in the foyer and said, 'We're not leaving until you say yes – this area needs a nursery,' and in the end we persuaded them."**

**"We finally got the building in May 2015, and then the builders took about three months to turn it around, so it was ready by mid-August."**



fast', so we were ready to rock and roll in the first week of September... Then we spent two months doing lots of open days, with parents asking, 'When are you opening?' It was quite embarrassing, actually. But we still had to sell the places, let people know that we were here – that we were going to be opening soon. I was on Ofsted's back on a weekly basis.

"They finally came on October 20th. Even then, a week later, we still couldn't open because we had to wait for them to post out our registration certificate – I said 'Can't you send a scan to me?!' because we had people wanting to start. We finally opened the nursery on the 26th, having been paying for staff, rent, insurance..."

"We were haemorrhaging – that's the term I use," Rachel says, "and we lost a lot of parents because of that, because they needed places in September. It was difficult."

## COMMITTED TO QUALITY

Despite the delays, Fount Nursery quickly won parents over – and that's not just because of the positive first impression its appearance guarantees. Elena and Rachel have consciously positioned their setting as a premium provider going above and beyond for discerning mums and dads, and are pulling out all the stops to deliver high standards of early education and care.

While it has proved a time-consuming and often frustrating process, recruiting skilled staff has been at the heart of their efforts. All but one of their practitioners can boast of a Level 3 qualification, but many hold degrees as well. The team



## ON RECRUITMENT...

**"We've had to learn a few lessons, as interviewing was new to both of us," Elena says of what is an ongoing recruitment process. "Some of the applicants come across as amazing in their interview, but then don't deliver. We've also had quite a number of staff who sadly didn't have a Level 3 – you just know that they'd be amazing, but sadly you can't have them."**

**"For us, having passion is really important, not just qualifications – and we do a trial morning so we can see whether or not applicants have the initiative to apply what they know to the workplace, and deliver every day, with children in situ."**

already includes a qualified primary school teacher, well equipped to support children as they approach the transition to primary school, and a Montessori-trained specialist. But it doesn't stop there – the setting can also call upon the talents of Kerryann Dunlop, a Fifteen-trained (fifteen.net) Jamie Oliver chef, who both prepares children's meals and leads them in their culinary-based learning.

Needless to say, this kind of expertise costs money, but funds have also been found to offer parents a fully inclusive service: nappies, wipes, creams and milk; a wide range of extra-curricular activities





such as Baby Sensory, Stretch yoga and forest school; and regular visits to local museums are all included in the setting's fees. Adding to the expense, ingredients for the children's meals are sourced from local traders – a decision made to both ensure quality and support the local community. That all this is being achieved despite a recent reduction in the nursery's fees (see panel) is an impressive feat.

Elena and Rachel admit that their commitment to this quality of provision has an impact on their bottom line, and that they continue to review their

approach with an eye on making savings. But they are adamant that any changes they make will not impact the quality of the experience children receive. "We could cut corners, cut the classes and others things, and we'd still be full because there's a shortage of nursery places here, but we don't want to do that," Elena says.

"It's not only about money," Rachel explains. "Our profit margin is smaller than it could be, but we're delivering something unique and that means we have more credibility. We want it to be perfect on every level because this is something we believe in."

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Some nursery owners prefer to adopt a hands-off approach to managing their settings, but although Elena and Rachel have recently taken the decision to step back and employ a manager to oversee the day-to-day running of Fount Nursery, they are still often on site or close by, and always busy. Elena continues to take responsibility for show-rounds and regularly observes her team's practice from an office that conveniently looks out onto the nursery's two base rooms. "The parents love that we're on site, that we're parents too and that we understand their needs," Rachel points out.

Even after the children have gone home, the hard work goes on – as Rachel puts it, "Running your own business is really difficult – you have to eat, sleep and breathe it."

"It's never-ending," Elena admits. "There are parents emailing at 10 o'clock at night..."

You could forgive them for wanting to stick with what they've got, but just halfway through their first year as nursery owners, and still awaiting their first Ofsted inspection, Elena and Rachel already have an eye on growing a business – a brand – that they feel has the potential to attract parents across London and beyond. At the same time both are conscious of the need to build on strong foundations: "We'll only look to grow when this nursery is watertight," Rachel says. "This has to work first, to give us the confidence to open up a second site."

"We're still learning," Elena agrees. "We don't claim to be perfect or anything – we've got to wait for that day!"

## ON SETTING FEES...

**"We started off at a premium level," Rachel says, "because we thought that London parents were able to pay it, looking at Islington, parts of the city... But we realised that was stopping us filling up as fast as we'd hoped. Parents told us, 'we absolutely love it, but we can't afford you'. We made the decision to drop our fees in March, and all of a sudden, that was it. Now we're only slightly more expensive than the market rate, but have a waiting list already..."**

## THE OWNERS



**ELENA  
MACKEY**  
"We do get emails from parents, saying

'job well done' or 'this is a concern'; and if it's the latter, we're on it. We're not behind the scenes, we're there."



**RACHEL  
MUNRO  
PEEBLES**  
"It's an amazing thing we've

created here. It's such hard work, but when a parent says their child has had an amazing time, that they love dropping him off, that makes it all worthwhile."

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# DRESS TO IMPRESS

*Your choice of staff uniform can say a lot about your nursery to prospective customers, so give it your full attention...*

**T**here are a range of factors that need to be considered when selecting a uniform for your staff team, or choosing, as some nurseries do, to go without. Creating a professional image, establishing your brand and the more fundamental concerns surrounding being able to tell at a glance practitioner from parent must be weighed against practicality and comfort, and, of course, price.

Here two nurseries share the thinking behind their working attire...



## LEXDEN LODGE KINDERGARTEN, COLCHESTER

At Lexden Lodge we wanted to have a really smart uniform from day one – it was important that carers/parents and grandparents coming to the nursery were able to easily distinguish the staff from parents or visitors, and we wanted the children to be able to recognise who belongs here, too, to add to their confidence in recognising who they could approach for support in play.

We took great care in deciding what sort of image we wanted to portray – we felt that something that depicted our seriousness about, and commitment to, the role of caring for children in their formative years, without being starchy, was perfect. We also felt that polo shirts alone were not quite what we wanted, although they are very useful, and easy-wearing, especially in the warmer months. After scanning the market for availability, and listening carefully to the staff about their comfort and ease of movement while wearing the uniform, and the quality and life expectancy of the garment, we made our choice.

From the beginning we knew we wanted a unique logo, and with the help of one of our past attendees, one was created that we are very happy with. Having a logo that has meaning and history makes it special, and to us is a reminder that all children are special.

**Mahila Samarbakhsh, Principal**



## CARING KINDERGARTENS, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

When a nursery's employees all wear a uniform it helps to create a strong, unified image for the company. At Caring Kindergartens, our uniform represents a commitment to safety, as well as a sense of honour and pride in our roles. Of course it solves the obvious 'what to wear today' problem, but more importantly it ensures that children and their families recognise staff immediately, which adds to the security of the nursery too.

The colour of a uniform is always going to be controversial – queries and comments along the lines of 'Does it suit me?' and 'This isn't my colour...' will no doubt be voiced – but, ultimately, you need to make sure the uniform you choose represents your setting and your ethos. The green polo shirt pictured was specifically chosen to convey a sense of freshness, safety and harmony – perfect for the wonderful practitioners who work directly with our children – while the blue blouses and shirts worn by members of our senior team represent truth and wisdom, something that we feel parents would expect of the people in charge of organising a busy nursery. These two distinctive styles, along with the name and job title badges we wear, also support parents and other service users to identify the individuals they need to speak to. We are proud of our uniform, as we are of the staff who wear it.

**Charlotte Rule, Nursery Manager**



# Creating safe & effective spaces

*When planning your nursery's interior, there are statutory requirements to which you must adhere – but don't forget to consider children's perspectives too, says **Melanie Pilcher**...*

**W**hether your nursery is in a purpose-built space or a converted building, how you organise its physical layout and resources is an important consideration. The environment you create through your choice of furnishing, design and equipment contributes to your overall effectiveness as a provider of childcare and education.

The first consideration is meeting statutory requirements as defined in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2014) (EYFS). This outlines what must be done to maintain the safety of the premises, ensuring all areas are fit for purpose and age appropriate. You will have to consider the following aspects:

- ❖ health and safety requirements (including fire safety and hygiene)
- ❖ emergency evacuation
- ❖ indoor space – i.e. square metres per child in each age range
- ❖ access to outdoor play/outdoor activities
- ❖ provision for sleep and rest
- ❖ toilets, hand basins and nappy-changing facilities
- ❖ an area for staff breaks, and an area for staff to talk confidentially to parents and carers.

Prospective providers must be able to demonstrate that they meet requirements before being registered. Ofsted will check that this is the case at the registration visit. Legislation defines 'premises' for childcare as being 'any area or vehicle', so providing there is a defined area for the sole use of children, childcare can take place in outdoor settings such as woodlands. This broadens out the idea of premises, allowing for creativity and flexibility when planning an effective learning environment, but does not lessen the need for safeguarding and welfare requirements.

It's important to remember that your requirements will change over time, for example a drop in birth-rate could result in reduced baby intake; or increased funding levels may mean more places are needed for two-year-olds. You will also have to provide for individual children, making 'reasonable adjustments' as necessary, so fixtures and fittings should be both functional and adaptable as you redefine rooms or areas to meet a need.

## THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Theorists including Lev Vygotsky and Friedrich Froebel placed great emphasis on the learning environment, reminding



us of the importance of children using their imagination and learning through exploration of their world. Your nursery's layout and fixtures should promote the emotional wellbeing of children, mirroring that which is familiar to them at home and in their local community, but also prompting their understanding of the world and how other people and cultures live.

Here are some further ideas for ensuring the effectiveness of specific areas of your setting:

### Entrance area

The entrance is a visitor's first impression of your setting, so it should be uncluttered and send out a clear message that the nursery is a safe, nurturing and welcome environment. Ensure there is ample space for parents and children arriving at the same time – you could provide a visitor book for parents to sign their child in and out, and a notice board displaying important information such as a copy of the current Ofsted report, lunchtime menus, planned closure dates, infection outbreak, etc.

Create a sense of belonging for children by providing name pegs and a place to put their personal items when they arrive. Security is paramount, so ensure systems are in place that mean no unauthorised visitor can gain access.

### Classrooms/ group rooms

The learning environment should be furnished in such a way that it can be



***Your nursery's layout and fixtures should promote the emotional wellbeing of children, mirroring that which is familiar to them at home.***





altered when required. Ergonomics are important: furniture should be child-sized with tables and chairs, soft cushions and flooring, activity tables and designated activity areas for learning to take place. Storage units on wheels can be moved around to help define different learning areas and should be labelled with their content so children can self-select. Nursery equipment suppliers have an excellent range of furniture and ideas for layout and use. Storage of large play equipment may require a garden shed or careful selection of equipment that can be dismantled and put away at the end of the session.

## Office space

How the manager uses their office is a good indication of how they lead and manage their staff. It should be a place where the door is open for anybody to pop in and ask a question, but should also provide privacy when difficult conversations have to take place. Filing cabinets that can be locked for personal records, IT equipment with internet access and, at the very least, a photocopier and telephone are all essential equipment.

## Staff room

Staff should be able to take breaks away from areas used by children. If space allows, it should have comfortable seating, lockers, access to professional development information and reading materials, tea- and coffee-making facilities and a small refrigerator. The staff room may have to

serve more than one purpose, e.g. storage, so it should be kept tidy and uncluttered.

## Bathrooms

Adults and children should not share toilet facilities. There should be an area for changing children who are in nappies that can be cleaned after each use. Consideration for staff who are lifting toddlers onto changing mats is important; some changing units are designed so that mobile toddlers can climb up themselves. Toilets must be checked regularly throughout the day, and any cracked fixtures such as wall tiles or plumbing must be repaired immediately to prevent infection. Some nurseries choose not to have doors on individual cubicles; however, children's privacy should be respected at all times (*read more on creating bathrooms for children on page 39 - Ed.*).

## Kitchen

If cooked meals and snacks are prepared on the premises then staff must receive training in food hygiene and be aware of how and where food is stored and how the kitchen should be maintained. Children should never have unsupervised access to the kitchen area.

The most important consideration when furnishing your nursery is to look at it from a child's perspective: what does it look, smell and feel like? How comfortable is it? Can I see my work on the walls? Do I feel safe and belong here? Am I inspired to explore and discover new things? Do I want to be here?

# FURTHER READING

**THE PRE-SCHOOL LEARNING ALLIANCE OFFERS A RANGE OF RESOURCES FOR NURSERY OWNERS AND MANAGERS, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING PUBLICATIONS:**

✿ **Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage** (available to Alliance members only)

✿ **Essential Policies and Procedures for the EYFS**

✿ **Language Links: Creating a Communication Rich Early Years Environment**

✿ **Fire Safety Record - For recording fire safety training, drills and equipment checks**

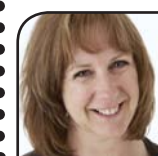
✿ **Visitors Signing In Record**

**For more information, visit [shop.pre-school.org.uk](http://shop.pre-school.org.uk)**

**Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2014)**



With non-statutory supporting documentation



*Melanie Pilcher is Policy and Standards Manager at Pre-school Learning Alliance.*





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# ARE YOUR WASHROOMS OUTSTANDING?

*Improving your nursery's toilets might not be at the top of your list of priorities, but don't underestimate their importance to children's wellbeing, says **Ged Hirst**...*

**A**s a nursery owner (or someone who is planning to be) you have a million things to think about. Schedules, staff, activities, the children, parents, not to mention the dreaded Ofsted. You are pretty busy. So where on the list is planning the washrooms? Where do you even start? Just how important are the toilets for your children?

The nursery toilets might be the first your children use away from home. These washrooms affect how they develop personal hygiene and perceive public toilets in the future. So do you provide cramped, grubby toilets that your children hate? Or do you plan outstanding washrooms that will last for years to come?

Don't feel overwhelmed or fear for your budget. Here are four areas you need to consider when planning a washroom refurbishment. Following these recommendations guarantee fantastic nursery toilets that don't have to cost the world...

## Safety first

The top priority is the children's safety when using the facilities. Ensure the toilets are cleaned often to avoid wet floors and reduce the spread of infection. Install low-height toilet cubicles. These offer privacy for the children but also allow for passive supervision by staff. Anti-trap hinges and magnetic door catches will avoid any little fingers getting squished. The hot water from the taps should be limited to a maximum of 43°C to avoid scalding.

## Know the regulations

The Department for Education created regulations and guidance for nursery washrooms. Provide one toilet and one washbasin for every 10 children under five years old. This can limit how many



children your nursery can accept. These provisions are commonly checked during an Ofsted inspection. Staff should have a separate washroom located away from the children's. Plan a hygienic area for changing nappies. A free guide that includes a summary of regulations is available at [washroomcubicles.co.uk/schools](http://washroomcubicles.co.uk/schools)

## Plan the design and layout

Careful planning of the washrooms can avoid practical problems further down the line. Locate the washrooms close to where the children will be. This might not always be possible, but ensure the washrooms are easy to access. Try to accommodate space outside the cubicles so an adult can supervise or assist a child. The best place for washbasins is directly opposite the

cubicles. This is so the children won't have to travel far to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Avoid dull design. Colourful cubicles will be a great feature. Hand-washing posters, pictures and vinyl designs provide learning opportunities for the children. You want the children to love the washrooms rather than fear them.

## Invest in the right products

Investing a bit more in the right products can save you more money over time. Low-height toilet pans and sinks are easy for the children to use. The toilet roll should be close enough to reach from the toilet. A dispenser would reduce toilet roll waste. Liquid soap is easier for children to use than a bar of soap; a dropped bar of soap will quickly get dirty. It is common for children to fear the loud noise of air hand dryers. Disposable paper towels are more hygienic. This is because they do a better job of drying the hands, which will reduce the spread of infection.

Washrooms are one of the smallest rooms but they can cause a big headache. You are busy enough running the nursery day to day. Getting the washrooms right the first time means you won't have to worry about them later on. Taking time to plan and investing in good products will create great toilets that last. Your children deserve a clean and safe washroom.

**Cubicle Centre have created a free guide to nursery washrooms - visit [washroomcubicles.co.uk/schools](http://washroomcubicles.co.uk/schools)**



*Ged Hirst is Marketing Manager at Cubicle Centre.*



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# Investing in your outdoors

*No matter how big or small it might be, improving your nursery's garden area can pay dividends, both in terms of children's learning outcomes and the popularity of your business...*



**A** nursery's garden area should be an extension of the setting itself, a space that when well designed will support children in their learning and development, as well as providing a safe and exciting place to explore and play in the fresh air. This is certainly the view of those at Kiddi Caru ([kiddicar.com](http://kiddicar.com)), where staff and children alike can be found outside whatever the weather – at each of the group's 20 nurseries there's always something to occupy curious minds, and plenty of space for energy to be expended.

In support of this approach, Kiddi Caru has invested heavily in developing its outdoor provision in recent times, creating feature-packed spaces that have delighted children, parents and staff alike. But what does an outstanding outdoor area need, and aside from the

obvious learning and developmental pluses, how can such an investment benefit a business? We asked Kiddi Caru's Marketing Manager, Caron Moseley, for her thoughts...

## How much should nurseries spend on an outdoor area?

"How long is a piece of string? You can spend huge amounts on an outdoor space if you want to – hiring professional companies to plan and install fantastic gardens. It's perhaps better to approach it by thinking about what it is you want to achieve from your outdoor space, and then working out a budget from there.

"Hiring an external garden design company is a great idea as whoever you choose will likely have a huge amount of experience and can give guidance on

what will be suitable for the space you have. However, you and your team need to make it your own. To this end, it is important to think about what interests the children that are currently in your care. One approach to this is to talk to the children themselves. We have achieved a great deal using this method. However, don't make the mistake of asking them what equipment they want outside – you will get an extremely long shopping list! Instead, speak about what the children would like to do outside (e.g. go on imaginary journeys, explore and ask questions, get active, or just sit and watch the world around them – all have value!).

"If money is tight, you can still create an interesting space on a small budget. Think about what indoor resources can be used outdoors – for example, art and craft materials. Use recycled materials – a blanket between two cardboard boxes makes an engaging but inexpensive secret den! Old house guttering fixed to the fence can make a water run, or a planter for seeds and saplings. Old wellies can make great plant pots! There is no limit to what can be achieved with a little imagination.

"Whichever approach you take, it's important to remember that your outdoor space should be constantly evolving and developing, and needs to be replenished and resourced regularly in the same way as your inside space."



***"Think about what it is you want to achieve from your outdoor space, then work out a budget from there."***



A snapshot of Kiddi Caru Basingstoke's new outdoor area.

## What else do you need to consider?

"It's not just children who benefit from spending time outside; many of our staff comment that they really enjoy outdoor play, too. But it's important to remember that to make the most of your garden you'll need to give your practitioners the tools to do their job. For this reason we are investing in providing a coat as a standard part of our uniform for all staff across our nurseries – so not only do our children have the right clothing to enjoy the outdoors, our practitioners and managers do too.

"Make sure that your outdoor learning spaces are as well resourced and looked after as those indoors – it's great to get the children involved in helping to pack items away at the end of the day. Make it fun and it becomes part of the routine. You may need to consider investing in outside storage to protect items from the elements.

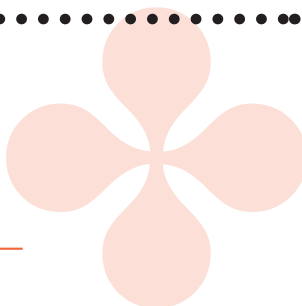
"If you do not have the benefit of a large outdoor space, ensure that you invest in a Kiddy Bus so that the staff can get out and about with the children."

## Will a well-resourced garden attract new customers?

"A garden filled with lots of opportunities to play and learn is always an attraction to parents; but even small outdoor areas can be packed full of valuable learning opportunities if the space is used wisely. A simple fence, for example, can be used to hang a chalk board, or 'painted' with water using big brushes in hot weather for children to see what happens, or equipped with pieces for guttering to support planting.

"Some settings do not have a lot of space, and their outdoor spaces can lack that wow factor as a result, but there are always opportunities to go beyond the nursery, into the community, on nature walks or to the local park, or even further – to the train station, for example – to explore children's interests. Evidenced in the form of a photo album, this would still attract new families to a setting."

# OUTDOOR OVERHAUL



## KIDDI CARU BASINGSTOKE

**TOTAL PROJECT SPEND: £40,000**

✿ Basingstoke has a large garden and recently a professional company redesigned one third of its space. The nursery's staff focused on features that will provide the children with an inviting and learning-rich environment, while offering plenty of opportunities to have fun – for example, a construction area and dens.

✿ The new garden includes both natural and synthetic turf as it is important that the children experience both types of surface. However, the artificial grass gives the children the chance to maximise the use of the garden all year round and is very easy to maintain.

✿ As part of the garden makeover, a new camp-making area has been added – complete with a raised den observatory, sleeping den and den-making equipment – as well as a multi-textured small world play area and a water play area, featuring a cobble waterfall, cobble puddle play surface and interactive water play channels.

✿ Nursery staff worked with their handyman to make improvements elsewhere, too, such as creating a free flow from the baby room into a bespoke baby garden. Artificial grass was laid and plant containers filled with sensory objects at the right height for little ones to help themselves.

✿ And that wasn't all – a musical area was created and affixed to the fence. This was constructed by recycling metal objects such as wheel hubs and kitchen utensils.





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# 3 STEPS TO SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

*How can focusing on being green help your business?*

**N**urseries have lots of plates to spin when it comes to balancing the care and safety of children, so it is understandable that for many, being sustainable – or environmentally friendly – can feel like just one more thing to squeeze into an already busy day. But when you consider the cost of running your business, and

the fact that often nurseries have higher than average energy and water bills, you will soon realise that actively managing those two things, alongside introducing some general good practice, can actually make a real difference to your bottom line, as well as helping the planet.

So, here are three steps you can take right now to make your setting more sustainable...

## 1 MANAGE YOUR CONSUMPTION

Your first step should be to list all the uses of energy and water within the premises, and then identify where you think improvements can be made. This will help you to prioritise your activities. Stuck for ideas? Here are some low-cost quick wins that you could get your sustainability drive up and running:

- Insulate draughty windows & doors.
- Improve wall and roof insulation.
- Replace old lights with energy-efficient LEDs.
- Re-negotiate your energy supplier contract to get a better deal.
- Fix dripping taps and fit water flow restrictors.
- Pay attention in the kitchen – when making tea or coffee, don't fill the kettle to the brim; just fill it to the level you actually need.
- Collect rainwater for cleaning floors and vehicles.

## 2 CHANGE YOUR HABITS

There are many simple things you and your team can do to improve sustainability. For example, remember to close doors to retain heat, put up notices reminding people to switch off lights when they're not needed, and be sure to avoid running taps

unnecessarily, to reduce water wastage. All of these things will reduce your costs over the year.

Getting support from staff, and parents, too, is vital to making these changes work, so make sure you get them on-side. Running activities for children can also help them understand, for example, the importance of recycling and embed good behaviours early on.

### TIP

FOR SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENTS, SUCH AS INSTALLING NEW BOILERS AND HEATING SYSTEMS, IT IS SENSIBLE TO INVESTIGATE THE TAX ALLOWANCES AVAILABLE THROUGH THE HMRC. GOV.UK SCHEME.

## 3 PROMOTE YOUR 'GREEN' CREDENTIALS

Being more sustainable isn't just about saving money – it can also make your nursery a more attractive option. Many businesses promote their sustainability activities on their websites to help promote their values, so why not highlight the steps you are taking to existing and prospective customers? As people are increasingly interested in their environment, especially where their children are concerned, it can be a real 'selling' point for some mums and dads when choosing a nursery.

## GET MORE HELP

In supporting SMEs to become more successful, Lloyds Bank plc provides a free online Sustainability Planning Tool, which allows you to create an action plan focusing on a wide range of areas, including energy, water, transport and waste management. You can also use our guide and templates to create a sustainability policy that can be used to promote your sustainability commitments.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT RESOURCES. [LLOYDSBANK.COM/BUSINESS-GUIDES/MANAGING-A-BUSINESS/SUSTAINABILITY](http://LLOYDSBANK.COM/BUSINESS-GUIDES/MANAGING-A-BUSINESS/SUSTAINABILITY)



# Offering something more

*If your nursery is 'only' providing day care, you could be missing a trick – giving parents a broader range of services and facilities to access can boost revenues and help you stand out from the crowd...*

**I**n the UK today people of working age are increasingly short of time. For those without children that might be a frustration, but for those with children it can mean nothing less than a full-blown crisis – if your children are too old for nursery but too young to be left at home alone during the school holidays, and family can't help, what do you do? If long hours in the office are hindering your ability to cook dinner in the evening, or schedule an overdue haircut, you can be similarly stuck.

Since reducing working hours is unlikely to be an option for mums and dads in this position, an increasing number of nurseries are extending their services to meet a range of different needs – from running holiday/after school clubs for older children to cooking meals for parents to take home in the evening. These services can benefit nurseries in multiple ways: they can entice potential customers to a setting, if they are perceived as adding value to a paid-for place; and they can prove a vital revenue stream in and of themselves, and in these straitened times can even mean the difference between the success and failure of a business. Additionally they can help to strengthen parent-practitioner partnerships, which are vital in supporting young children's learning and development.

Going down this route needn't mean a major investment of time or money to begin with. At Fount Nursery in Hackney (see our case study on this unique setting from page 30 – Ed.) local

demand for holiday childcare led to the nursery setting up a two-week Easter Club. Children attended between the hours of nine and three, and were treated to a programme of activities and visits, with parents charged at a flat rate of £30 per day. It proved so popular that parents have also enquired about the summer holidays, and it no doubt generated much good will towards the setting, as well as additional revenue.

Of course, the sky really is the limit for those who wish to diversify, as one setting in South West London, in particular, demonstrates.



***“Families told us they wanted services tailored to everyone – an integrated child and family facility.”***



## CLAPHAM VILLAGE

In September 2014, Bright Horizons opened its Clapham Village nursery (pictured) to the public – the setting was described at the time as “the first of a new breed of state-of-the-art ‘super nurseries’”, and it is certainly a great example of how far ambitious and innovative providers can take the idea of offering parents additional services and facilities.

“At Bright Horizons, it is our mission to make a difference to the lives of children, families and employers, and we believe that nurseries should help parents to make the most of family life,” Simone Carter, the business’s Senior Operations Director, told us. “We know from our own research that families are travelling from further afield to their preferred childcare providers and are busier than ever before, often juggling responsibilities at home and at work. It was because we recognised the needs and challenges of modern family life that we opened Bright Horizons Clapham Village – a nursery that provides a wonderfully rich environment for children but also supports busy families through offering a wide range of services.

“It’s located in the heart of a thriving community and was developed through





## ADDED EXTRAS

**MANY CHILDREN HAVE PARENTS WHO ARE MONEY-RICH AND TIME-POOR. EXTRA SERVICES CAN BE OFFERED AND CHARGED FOR AT A PROFIT, GIVING YOU MORE INCOME AND USING UP HOURS WHEN STAFF ARE UNDER-UTILISED. HAVE YOU CONSIDERED:**

- 1 **Supplying nappies and wipes.**
- 2 **Providing additional meals – either to be eaten in nursery, or to be taken home for the weekend.**
- 3 **Keeping the child's 'wardrobe' at nursery and washing it, so that the parents only need worry about weekends and just drop off and collect the child in their pyjamas.**
- 4 **Providing personal care, such as haircuts and cutting finger or toenails.**
- 5 **Offering weekend trips out to the cinema or a pantomime.**

listening carefully to what parents in Clapham want most and bringing together the wider community – encompassing the African proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child'.

"During the initial stages, we worked closely with families and distilled many decades' worth of our team's experience. Life can be hectic for parents and carers, and families told us they wanted services tailored to everyone – an integrated child and family facility.

"As such Clapham Village boasts outdoor and indoor play areas, and bespoke studios for children to play and learn. It also has a Parent Hub and relaxation area, complete with sofas for families to relax but also meet one another, creating a nursery community. Families also have access to a 'hot desk' with a variety of technology and equipment, including free Wi-Fi, and can help themselves from our 'grab and go' breakfast area for those busy mornings – we know that sometimes every minute helps! There's also an on-site laundry service, yoga and pilates, and a children's hairdresser, all of which helps to take care of essential errands and ensures family life runs smoothly. Our nursery team also partners with a

local health visitor, who offers support and advice on family health topics and carries out developmental and physical checks.

"Since Clapham Village opened, feedback from families has been very positive and we continue to listen to our parents to ensure that we're fully meeting their needs on an ongoing basis," Simone says. "Families have highlighted the education spaces and facilities, which 'encompass the traditional and the state of the art' and the provision of additional facilities, 'even exercise classes for parents, which is fantastic'.

"Clapham Village was created to be the best possible environment in which children can flourish while also offering support for today's busy parents. Through extra facilities, a nursery can become an extension of home life while also encouraging parents and practitioners to work in collaboration, which is great for children and their development."

## TIME TO DIVERSIFY

While not all nursery businesses will have the space or spending power necessary to recreate what is being offered at Clapham Village, it does serve to illustrate the breadth of potential 'added extras' that can

be offered to families in need of a helping hand. With parents unlikely to find the pressures on time they face receding, and nurseries needing to maximise their profitability in the face of government policy, now might be a good time to start thinking about what strings your setting could add to its bow.

# Save on your consumables

*Banana Moon undertook a review of their purchasing and found that switching to Gompels was an easy decision to make...*

**T**he Banana Moon Day Nursery business ([bananamoonfranchise.com](http://bananamoonfranchise.com)) is unique, with nurseries, characters, books, stories and songs all helping to create strong brand loyalty and a wonderful experience for children, parents and setting owners alike. After conducting a review of their purchasing around 12 months ago, Banana Moon said, "Gompels demonstrated significant savings for us on our core list, identifying savings of over 15% just on price, against all other suppliers."

By using a Core List system through [gompels.co.uk](http://gompels.co.uk), Banana Moon were able to limit products their sites could order, reducing their spend significantly. Banana Moon went on to say, "This was combined with Gompels exceptional deliveries, excellent account management and easy supplier management, and they continue

to deliver savings above our expectations. Gompels do what they promise – great service, low pricing and an easy relationship to manage."

## SIMPLE SAVINGS

Jack Blake, Director of Key Accounts at Gompels, said, "Working with Banana Moon has been a pleasure; they really wanted to make savings and gave us the opportunity to demonstrate the best way to do so." He added, "Banana Moon, just like our other customers, are now making simple savings by using Gompels. Setting up accounts is easy, no matter how many sites you have. We supply to over 4,000 nursery customers who are extremely pleased with the service we provide."



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# Am I charging enough?

*You need to understand how much your nursery costs and what parents believe it is worth before setting your fees, says Chris Townson...*



**S**o it's time to review your fees, but how exactly are you going to decide upon what is your major income stream. Are you going to:

- A** Ring up every nursery in a three-mile radius and use their fees?
- B** Set fees based on your costs alone as you know them at the occupancy level you expect?
- C** Decide what you think you can charge?
- D** Guess and hope?
- E** Reflect on the clearly thought-out strategy you used when you first opened to give you a reasoned argument along with proper future budget projections?

If you chose the last option, well done: the most important thing to do is to have a plan, decide your market position and stick to it. Of course that's easier said than done. As someone who was corporately trained, outside the childcare sector, in sales and marketing I thought I was well placed to understand market forces, but we at Toybox Nursery went wrong in the past by *not charging enough!* So here's what you need to think about...

## WHAT'S IT WORTH?

Let's start by introducing a very simple sales rule that applies to everyone paying for goods or services: whether it involves conscious or subconscious decision-making, there is a tipping point past which people won't buy something, based on what they believe about the product or service.

### Cost vs value

This is the cornerstone of getting your fees broadly into the right area. Put simply, the cost of something you want to sell has to be beaten by the perceived value in customers' eyes to make them want to buy. Let me show you two examples:

#### CUSTOMER 1

- ❖ A customer perceives the value of your full day care at £50.
- ❖ You currently charge £60 per day.

The customer is *unlikely* to want to come to your setting in this scenario.

#### CUSTOMER 2

- ❖ A customer perceives the value of your full day care at £50.
- ❖ You currently charge £40 per day.

The customer is *very likely* to want to come to your setting in this scenario.

Looking at this in a little more detail, let's review what happens if you have to charge a minimum of £50 per day for business reasons – the results are worrying:

- ❖ You have a low occupancy due to cost versus value and in the end, a lack of income to make strong investments in your buildings and staff.
- ❖ Perhaps worse still you have to cut costs, not just investment, to stay in profit or simply break even.
- ❖ In the long term you are forced to invest in the value side of the equation – driving quality outcomes, staff and buildings, but this requires time and money.

This simple conclusion shows how vital it is to decide your strategy about cost



***It's vital to decide your strategy about cost and value before you set an initial fee.***

## STATUS & REPUTATION

### CAN YOU LOSE CUSTOMERS BY CHARGING TOO LITTLE?

*Knowing the perceived value of your care is important. It's an area we badly underestimated once, when we set our opening fees for our new nursery too low. It meant that instead of having lots of customers coming in, as our fees were cheaper than our competitors', our 'value' customers didn't bother to look because we were too cheap - in their minds we could not be any good.*

*The reverse applies, however, if you start by making big investments in quality buildings, graduate-level staff and produce fantastic outcomes. As one customer remarked to us, "I have no issue whatsoever with a fee increase; I'm so appreciative of the way in which you deal with every aspect of Georgina's day-to-day care."*

and value before you set an initial fee. To suddenly change midstream and increase the value takes time and investment, but to cut fees to match your perceived value may result in you not covering your costs.

### Business requirements

Here fees are calculated purely on a cost basis plus a profit margin. This area shows how cost control is needed to maintain a solid basis. A nursery needs to control its direct expenses, direct consumables and fixed overheads. These give you a monthly total you need to achieve to cover each area; you then need to add a margin on top of this if you want to make a profit and remain sustainable.

However, what is your cost base for different occupancy levels? There is a breakeven figure that you have to achieve to simply pay all your costs, but that is a total amount of money and not related to a fixed price per hour, per child or per % occupied. You could assume 100% occupancy, adjust your direct expenses and direct consumables to match that figure then add fixed costs – but what happens if you don't achieve the full nursery?

By way of warning, don't get mixed up in occupancy percentage as that is an indicator of volume not profit. You could be 100% occupied charging £1 per child and go bust – or be 1% occupied and charge £100,000 for that single child and be in profit.

However, whatever the figure you come to there is a further challenge related very heavily to cost versus value, and market-led forces:

- ❖ If you need to charge more than your perceived value then you will struggle to make the business pay.
- ❖ If your costs and margin mean you have to charge way more than a competitor then again you are likely only to pick up parents they can't help, unless your perceived value is higher than theirs.

Either way the pressure on margin is massive.

### Market-led forces

This is simply looking at what others charge, and is the way most nurseries set fees. Unfortunately it's a flawed approach, as the other nurseries might have a lower cost base. Market forces are significant in deciding the fees you can and should charge; however, are you following a trend or setting one yourself?

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Setting a price point is something multi-national companies spend millions of pound on. They have researchers, business analysts, market specialists in strategy and then of course sales teams, marketing teams, accountants and shareholders to judge their success. For most single nurseries, or indeed small chains, there is just you.

However, don't decide to do a fee review in a day, or even a week; good planning and execution will make the difference between a financially sound nursery and one nearer the brink of cost-cutting and possibly worse. It will never be easy – if it was there would be lots of people delivering outstanding care and profit – but you must try.



Chris Townson is a Director of Toybox Nursery, and provides a sales consultancy service for the sector.





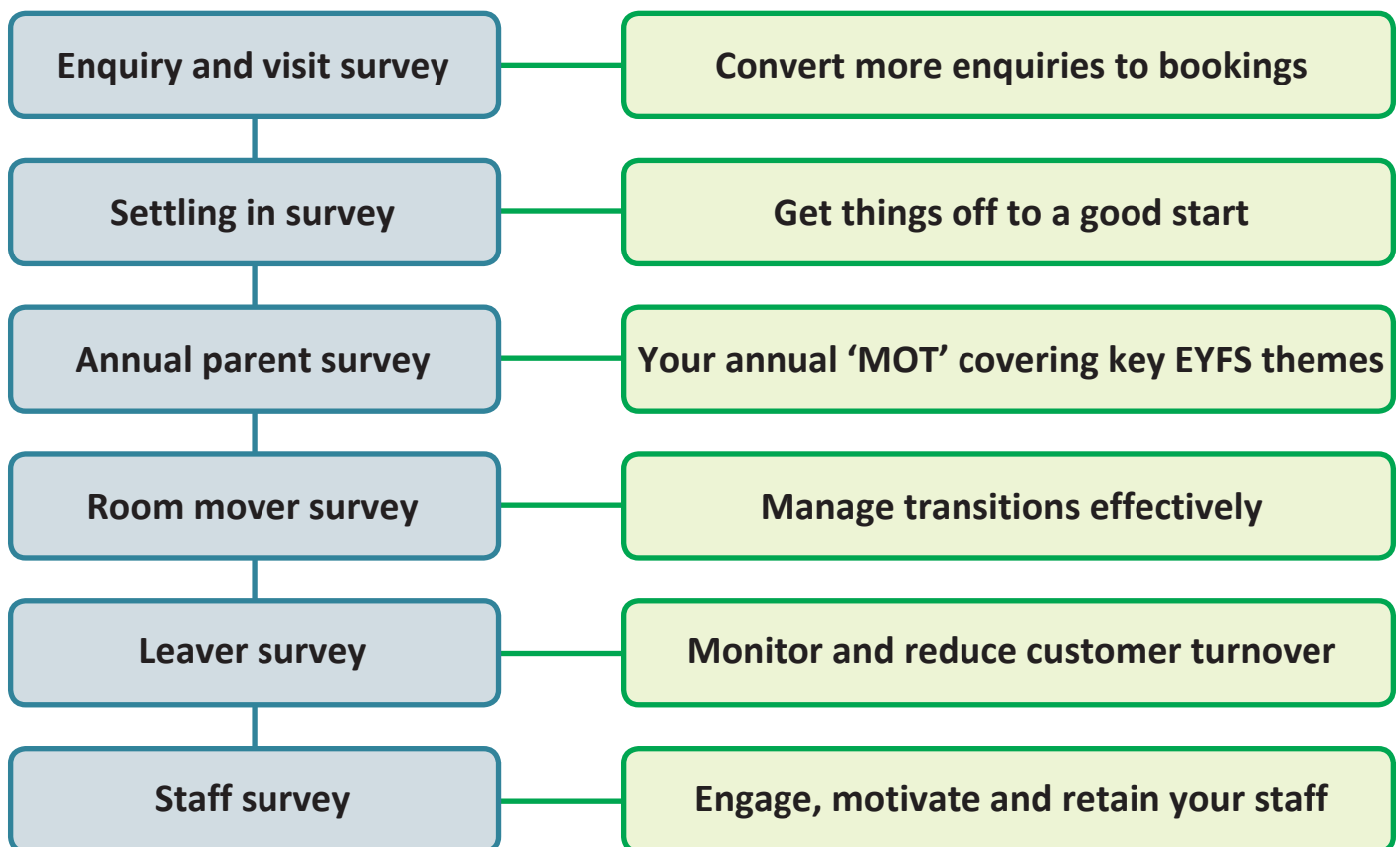
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**"The provider has exceptionally effective monitoring systems...."**

Linda Baston-Pitt, Managing Director of Ofsted Outstanding Old School House Nursery

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# Boosting your budget

*Asking for support from your community can make a real difference in these straitened times, but it must be handled sensitively. **Lorraine Jenkin** explains how to raise funds without raising blood pressures...*



**I**n the nursery sector funds are often tight, and settings' options for raising extra cash are limited. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try – there are times when certain purchases will be so beneficial that finding a means to pay for them is worth the effort. But how do you persuade parents who already pay a lot for your services (even though you earn every penny and probably more) to reach into their pockets? The answer is, you get creative...

## THE FUNDAMENTALS

Firstly, it's important to distinguish between what a business cost – e.g. utility bills – and what is an acceptable 'extra', for example, converting an under-used storage area into a storytelling room. If you need extra funds to keep the setting open, you'll need to look at your business practices, expenditure and income. No fee-paying parent will give up their Saturday morning to raise money for what they perceive to be your financial mismanagement!

Secondly, if you're thinking of asking parents and staff to help with fundraising, you must ensure that yours is the kind of nursery they will *want* to help. If you treat parents as service-users and staff as service-providers, you're less likely to be able to count upon their support. Instead, appreciate their worth as part of the nursery family – their loyalty may well surprise you. Identify parents and staff who will want to help; not all will, but key people can galvanise others into activity.

## BE SPECIFIC

The best way of asking for help is to target a project, then break it down into items and costs, and be specific. People are more trusting of '10 bags of peat at £3.75' than '£50 for materials'; it shows

**No parent will give up their Saturday morning to raise money for what they perceive to be your financial mismanagement!**





## PASSIVE FUNDRAISING

### FOUR IDEAS TO SUPPLEMENT YOUR BUDGET...

- 1 **If you are a charity or good cause, register with [easyfundraising.org.uk](http://easyfundraising.org.uk) and get parents and staff to do their online shopping via the website. Retailers donate varying percentages to the cause with every transaction.**
- 2 **Do clothes, shoes and rag collections (organisations vary by area). Payment is per kg collected, and a few hundred pounds per half-transit van collection is not unusual. Many parents consider it an opportunity to have a clear out. The Rag Bag in Scotland does "all nurseries". Check out [bag2schools](http://bag2schools.org) or Rags to Riches.**
- 3 **Collect printer cartridges from parents and local businesses. Send them off in pre-paid envelopes.**
- 4 **Register with companies such as Yellow Moon for parents to order stationery and craft products that their children will want to use at home – and get a 10% kickback.**



you've researched your prices. In doing this you might find someone who loves to see children gardening happy to cover all the peat (just one conversation about children not having good winter coats in my local nursery resulted in a parent donating 12 sets of waterproofs!).

It's important to break down tasks as well as costs; you will never know what skills your extended nursery family have until you make your needs known. Discussing the ideas in conversation is best, as people are more responsive to subtlety than a begging letter.

Whilst many parents might be happy to give a Saturday morning for free, you need to be realistic about paying for larger tasks. However, some parents may be willing to offset their hours for yours – just be wary of taking money off their bills; far better to give them the time in days when you have spare capacity that you might as well fill.

## MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES

Once you've exhausted initial gifts of time and donations, you need to organise some engaging fundraising activities. I'm always happy to bake a cake for a stall (even though I usually have to buy it back as no one else wants it...). However, I don't like being asked to sponsor something – especially something as pointless as a

sponsored silence. I'd much rather pay to have my car washed or my children's faces painted.

People like to get something for their money, be it a thing or entertainment, but don't repeat an idea too often. Try selling quiz sheets, guess the number of sweets in the jar, selling squares on a board, or raffles. Get the children to grow herbs, then decorate the pots for sale.

Piggyback other events where people expect to spend money – do a 'guess the weight of the fruitcake' at a Christmas fair. Sharing events with registered charities will give you access to far more opportunities and pots of money. Bingo evenings, Body Shop/Anne Summers/Jamie at Home parties, race nights and pub quizzes are popular fundraisers because they work.

## BUSINESS SUPPORT

Asking local businesses for donations – of cash, favours or items – can be beneficial, but there are rules: always write a letter and then get a person, be it staff member or parent, who actually uses the business to hand it in. It's a bit insulting for a stranger to ask for money, especially from small businesses, as contributions will come from the owner's pocket. Even with large businesses such as supermarkets or building suppliers, ask someone who has a loyalty card or a builder's account to enquire.

You should also aim to offer something in return. Local newspapers are usually happy to receive a photo of a project featuring smiling children; ensure you include the names of your benefactors in the press release. *Always* write a letter of thanks (from the children), including a copy of the newspaper cutting, if applicable.

Many larger businesses have small grant schemes for local projects. They do it for PR, to show they're part of the community. Many simply require a photo afterwards for publicity purposes.

Try supermarkets, banks and less-neighbourly businesses – quarries, wind farms, heavy industry – that are trying to improve their reputations. Public-funded nurseries are more likely to benefit than private businesses, but careful wording can work wonders. It may sound manipulative, but make any begging letter purely about the children...

## GIFTS & SERVICES

There are a number of things you can organise to benefit your parents that will allow you to earn a commission from service-providers. Organise annual photo sessions (highlight the opportunity for a whole-family photo). Items that have the input of the children are always popular: Christmas cards with children's paintings on the front, tea towels of all their faces (better with older children), mugs or jigsaws with photos on. Try to target occasions such as Mother's/Father's Day, Christmas, etc. – parents will have to buy something anyway, so why not help them out? Offer them in plenty of time, don't repeat too often and make them cute!

## GIVING SOMETHING BACK

As with everything, it can't always be take – you have to give something back. Raise the nursery's profile locally by joining in with community events. Collect money on a walkabout for Comic Relief; enter a float or a group of walkers in the carnival; shop locally; ask if you can have a toddlers' race at the local school's sports day; plant bulbs outside an old folks' home, and you'll soon have a list of places to sell your raffle tickets, distribute your quizzes and promote your events.



*Lorraine Jenkin is an author who has been involved in childcare for several years.*

# Should I stay or should I grow?

Expanding your nursery business requires a clear plan and a steady hand, says **Sarah Steel**...

**F**

or every single-site nursery operator who is happy running one setting and has no ideas of expansion, there is another thinking,

'What next?' If you fall into the second category, your desire to grow might be part of a long-held ambition to build a brand, or a pragmatic response to current circumstances – maybe your first site is full and you have additional demand that you can't fulfil without opening a second site, for example. But whatever the reason, there are pros and cons to expanding that you need to consider.

## THINK ABOUT

- ❖ **Why do you want to expand?**
- ❖ **Do you have the necessary skills to manage a larger business? If not who will help you?**
- ❖ **How will you choose new sites/locations?**
- ❖ **How will you fund expansion? (E.g. remortgage your existing property/use bank finance/use investors.)**
- ❖ **How will you manage quality?**
- ❖ **Do you have people already in your business who support your plans for expansion?**

Over the last 15 years my nursery group, The Old Station, has been from one site all the way up to 16, and is now back down to six. During that time, we have bought existing settings, opened new ones and taken term-time only nurseries and made them into full day care settings. In each case we have faced different challenges, so it's important operators think carefully about what they are letting themselves in for.

### CHOOSE YOUR SITE

You have the option of acquiring an existing nursery from another provider who wishes to exit the sector. Doing so usually means you will pay a premium price, as the nursery will already be trading. The advantage of this approach is that you will get instant income – but you also get the reputation the provider you are replacing has earned, which may not be a good thing. Do your homework carefully and make sure you really know what you are buying.

Alternatively, you can look for an empty premises to refurbish/convert to make another nursery. This is cheaper, as you are not paying for goodwill. However, you will start with no customers (unless you already have a waiting list at your existing setting and it is close by). Allow a budget for marketing and for gradual build up of numbers, and offset this against your costs.

### How big?

Whilst we have some smaller sites, with only 30 childcare places, generally a registration of at least 60 children is more financially viable, unless you are looking at a site with very low rent and overheads. Be cautious of buying a small going concern that is owner-run, as by the time you have added it to your group and

put in place a manager, you may find that profits are minimal.

### Consider costs

Think about the detail of your local market and compare this with new sites you may be contemplating. Sometimes moving only a few miles away can mean different rental rates and that you can charge different fee rates – don't automatically assume it will be the same.

### Don't stretch yourself

I strongly recommend considering how far your second or subsequent sites are from your first. As your group grows, you will be spending time travelling between settings, so you need to decide what is reasonable for you and your staff to manage. Also, if your sites are close together, you will be able to share staff and resources; if you are too far away this becomes more difficult.

### MANAGING QUALITY

One of the biggest challenges with growth is managing quality. When you have one site, you can run it exactly as you want to and be there all the time. As soon as you have two sites or more, that changes. Our second site was a 40-minute drive from the first, and I remember well receiving a





phone call from the manager of the latter while at the former, telling me that she was short-staffed. There was a sudden realisation that I was 40 minutes away and wouldn't be able to step in to help.

You will need to think carefully about the skills of each site manager and what support you will need. Generally you will need at least three or four sites before you can afford an area manager, so will you fill the gap yourself in the meantime? Do you all agree on what good quality is? You need to clearly define what you expect and then work out how you are going to ensure this is taking place.

## SUPPORTING MANAGERS

As your group grows, you will need to think about how you support your managers and staff. You will need some sort of central function or support services, to help with HR, finance, suppliers, etc. It is easy to let this central team grow if you aren't careful, and before you know it you may be spending a large part of your increased revenue on managing your nurseries. Some groups cap their head office costs at 10% or less of turnover, and this may be a useful figure to consider.

The advantage of being a group is that you can pool resources and buy in training that all of your nurseries can

benefit from, which you might not be able to afford as a single-site operator. We meet as a team of managers every two months and often use this for continuing professional development or to meet a new supplier. As a whole company, we have a 'leadership day' once a year and invite a speaker to run a training session – we have enjoyed sessions from Laura Henry and Elizabeth Jarman in the last two years, and have Neil Farmer booked for this year's event.

## PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION

Finally, your reputation as a group can be a great thing, as everyone benefits if it's positive. However, you must be aware of the dangers to all from one piece of bad luck, be it a poor Ofsted inspection or an accident. Think about how you will deal with any problems, and how you can protect your business in the event of an unexpected issue.



***Think carefully about the skills of each site manager and what support you will need.***



Sarah is Managing Director of The Old Station Nursery group. For support and training, email [sarahsteel@theoldstationnursery.co.uk](mailto:sarahsteel@theoldstationnursery.co.uk)

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# Why you'll love e-learning journals

*Paper-based approaches to recording children's progress may be tried and tested, but their electronic equivalents offer functionality that can make running an outstanding nursery easier, explains **Deborah Fielden**...*

**T**he day of an early years practitioner is an extremely busy one. From the moment that children and their families are welcomed into the setting, staff work hard carrying out a wide range of roles and responsibilities in order to establish and maintain safe and stimulating environments, ensuring every child is happy and has their learning and development promoted and supported effectively.

Central to this process is the practice of observing and assessing each child's starting points, learning styles, progress and achievements, in partnership with parents and carers. However, ask settings about this part of their professional role and you'll soon realise that many spend considerable time reflecting upon their practice in an effort to make improvements, and are always looking for solutions to make their systems more efficient and effective.

Enter technology, which seems to have provided an effective solution. Over the last couple of years, an increasing number of companies have produced electronic (e-) learning journal software to support the process and recording of observations and assessments, as well as the tracking of both individual and groups of children's progress and achievements. Converts talk of how the introduction of this software has had an overwhelmingly positive effect on the quality of their practice and argue that the initial expense purchasing the software has been money very well spent.

But what exactly are the benefits?

## TIME & MONEY

There are never enough hours in the day to complete and record observations and assessments of every child on a regular basis. For many practitioners, keeping

their key children's paper learning journeys up to date has become both a chore and a luxury. Non-contact time is rarely guaranteed and even when it is available, it means that practitioners have to spend large amounts of time away from their most important role – that of being with the children – in order to print, cut out and stick and annotate photographs, and transfer information to assessment and tracking grids. E-learning journals provide a far more time-efficient way of collecting and collating all this information without practitioners even needing to leave the room. Paperwork is minimised, storage space is freed up and money spent on printer ink, paper, scrapbooks and folders is saved!



**Parents can add their own observations and photographs from home, opening new lines of communication.**





## PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

This is an area in which the introduction of e-learning journals really makes a significant impact; feedback from both practitioners and parents themselves is overwhelmingly positive. Most software packages include a notification feature so that parents are made aware when new observations and assessments have been added. Parents can also add their own observations and photographs from home, opening new lines of communication, supporting consistency between home and setting, and enabling successful partnership working.

Parents enjoy the opportunities that sharing photographs with children away from the setting gives them to talk about what they have been doing during the day, helping them relive and retell their experiences. Similarly, practitioners can use the home photos to start conversations at

the setting, promoting attachments with their key children and providing great opportunities for communication and language development.

## DATA COLLECTION

Tracking and being accountable for every child's progress and achievements is part of every practitioner's professional responsibility. A clear system of collecting and analysing the data about each child at regular intervals is essential to this process; this information is needed to ensure that any concerns about development can be identified and addressed quickly, and that the most appropriate environment and support can be provided for every child. Most software packages allow this to be done quickly and efficiently by transferring all observations and assessments to a related development tracking system, and providing summative data information easily.

As well as providing this data for

individual children, the software also enables the production and analysis of information about specific cohorts and groups of children, e.g. EAL, funded/non-funded two-year-olds, boys/girls. This helps practitioners to continually reflect upon their provision and practice, considering action points and addressing any barriers to the progress of particular groups.

## EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

The introduction of the Common Inspection Framework has seen an increased focus on how effective the managers of early years settings are in leading high-quality provision and driving improvement. Leaders of settings that have implemented e-learning journals comment on how their introduction has helped them fulfil their role more effectively in a number of ways.

Firstly, it enables them to monitor and keep an effective overview of the progress and achievements of both individuals and groups easily online, and to produce reports and evidence for both internal use – to inform future planning and improvements – and external bodies such as Ofsted. The introduction of funding initiatives such as the Early Years Pupil Premium means that managers must be able to justify how they have invested money by demonstrating that it has made a real difference to the progress of children for whom it is claimed; this software supports this responsibility very effectively.

Secondly, it seems that the use of e-learning journals enables managers to monitor and support staff performance and development in a more time-efficient and innovative manner. Managers can easily access the observations and assessments of individual practitioners and identify any CPD requirements as a result. Similarly, managers can encourage staff to access each other's journals, enabling moderation, improved consistency of judgements and the sharing of good practice.

Thirdly, managers report the positive effect that introducing e-learning journals has had on their staff's morale and confidence in their professional role and abilities. The whole process is made simpler and less arduous, and the stress caused by lack of time is alleviated.

## CHOOSING SOFTWARE

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN E-LEARNING JOURNAL PACKAGE...

#### Ease of use:

**Choose a package that everyone is happy with. Take advantage of free trials and review the pros and cons of each option as a team before making the final decision. It will take time for everyone to become confident using any new system, but some are easier to get to grips with than others!**

#### Parent participation:

**Make sure that the software allows easy two-way sharing of information between home and setting. Be vigilant about checking the security systems and protocols offered by the package, as this has obvious safeguarding and data protection implications for your setting.**

#### Data production and analysis function:

**Look for a package that can deliver progress and achievement data for both individual and specific groups of children, enabling easy analysis to inform reflection and subsequent improved provision and practice. This will also enable you to provide evidence for Ofsted during an inspection.**



Deborah Fielden is an early years consultant. Follow @DeborahFielden.

This article first appeared in Teach

Early Years magazine – visit [teachwire.net](http://teachwire.net) to access more outstanding advice and to subscribe.



# Digital dividends

*Capture Education explain how you can unlock a commercial advantage with technology...*

While you may have first started running

a nursery for the love of nurturing children, it is ultimately a commercial venture. And as with any commercial venture, to be able to survive, a nursery business needs to generate revenue and profit. However, unlike many other small businesses, a nursery is heavily regulated by government, and the customer is not just any customer – it's the parent of a much-loved child who would probably prefer to be staying at home with their little one as opposed to returning to work.

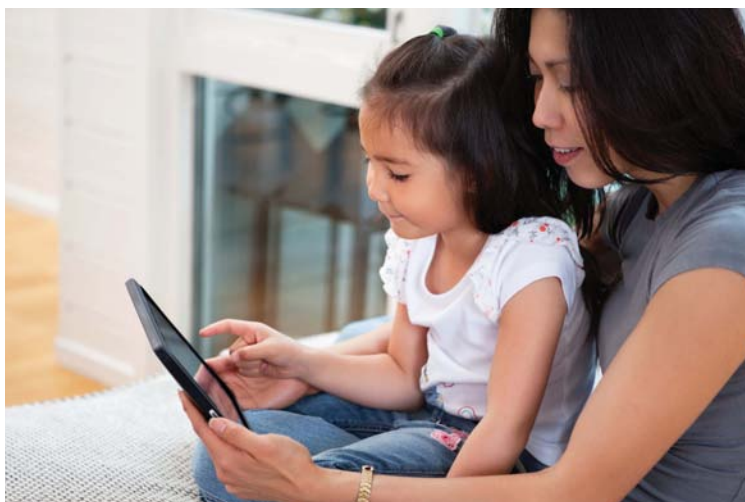
This presents a challenge. On one hand nurseries must satisfy administrative and legislative demands, and be publicly evaluated against Ofsted standards; on the other they must ensure a loving, caring and nurturing environment in which the child will flourish, giving parents peace of mind.

So as a nursery business, how can you meet these apparently conflicting demands without incurring unnecessary costs? One solution involves the management of the children's learning journals.

## CHANGING ROLES

Learning journals are the accepted way of meeting observational assessment requirements; they are believed to be the most reliable way of building up an accurate picture of children's development. But here's the tricky bit. There is no prescribed method of gathering evidence, nor any expectation that it should be recorded in a specified way.

In years gone by, 'learning journals' were kept by nurseries as a way of sharing special moments with parents, with pictures used to capture key developmental milestones. However, in recent times nurseries are expected to show a child's development, often using the early years curriculum as a basis and the learning journal as an evidence book for Ofsted.



As such, the traditional paper-based and 'fun' scrapbooks have now become an administrative burden on staff that can literally take hours to produce and then require further moderation. From a commercial perspective, this has cost implications and given the further demands placed on nurseries recently – the Living Wage, increased 'free' childcare places, GCSE and ratio changes – it is becoming harder than ever to keep nurseries profitable whilst retaining the highest quality standards.

Moreover, from the parents' perspectives, learning journals are kept at the nursery and only generally taken home when the child leaves the setting. As a nursery business, how do you address this imbalance? The good news is that technology offers a solution.

## EFFICIENT & EFFECTIVE

The widespread adoption of smartphones and tablet devices, and the rise of social media, means technology is an everyday part of parents' lives. Communication by text, email and closed Facebook groups are all commonplace channels in nursery businesses today. Why should learning journals be the exception?

The answer is, they shouldn't! Digital learning journals like Capture Education exist to give nursery businesses an efficient and effective tool for sharing special moments with parents and simultaneously recording learning

outcomes for reporting to Ofsted and tracking against a range of criteria.

Everything that was once the reserve of printing, cutting and sticking can now be recorded in the moment and attached directly to a child and the relevant learning outcomes, using a fully secure and cloud-based system.

From a commercial perspective, using Capture Education frees up practitioners to focus on their prime role: delivering childcare and meeting

much-needed ratios in the rooms.

Equally importantly, the system gives nurseries an effective way of communicating with parents and offers peace of mind. Through a secure parental log in, settings can now choose to share special moments during the day, as they happen, without any labour-intensive downloading of images to computers and emailing out to individual parents.

The digital recording of children's progress is also mapped directly to early years curriculums, which saves even more time when assessing where any developmental gaps might be and producing reports to manage cohorts.

Transitioning from paper to digital is a very easy step to make. Capture Education has a team of early years professionals who can help guide you through the set up and implementation – including how to communicate with your parents.

.....



**To learn more about digital learning journals, visit**  
**[www.capture-education.co.uk/nb](http://www.capture-education.co.uk/nb)**

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# Improve your efficiency

*Learn how FirstSteps management software can benefit your nursery...*

Implementing a flexible, all-inclusive nursery management system is a high priority for many settings. From the beginning FirstSteps was designed to improve your efficiency, increase profitability, reduce running costs and save you time, but now it has embraced the latest technology to create a system that is even more effective. In particular, it has Ofsted's requirements covered, making paper-based documentation a thing of the past.

## STREAMLINED & SECURE

Planning and projections, sustainability and growth, as well as day-to-day staffing and practical childcare challenges are juggled within every nursery business. Administering all of these is made easy with FirstSteps. Its hosted service (using the latest cloud computing technology) is totally secure and doesn't require a complicated set-up. The all-inclusive monthly paid contract is based on your exact requirements with no hidden extras. All you need is access to the internet. This is perfect for childcare settings where:

- Staff work in several locations (especially home-based) and need to share information in real time
- The cost of managing systems in-house is too high, but you need to operate professionally to meet expectations.

### FEATURES INCLUDE

- ❖ Data stored securely with 24/7 server security
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- ❖ Can be used with single or multiple user logins from any location with internet access
- ❖ Reduces hardware costs by eliminating the need for local area network server upkeep
- ❖ Password protected with restricted 'authorised user only' access.



## FIRSTSTEPS TRACKER

The innovative FirstSteps Tracker app, which is compatible with any Android, Apple or Windows 10 device, enables EYFS development observations to be made easily from a tablet, producing comprehensive learning journals. It allows you to capture photographs and audio clips, along with EYFS and CoEL tagging to track progress and produce analytical reports for all areas of learning.

The Tracker runs alongside the FirstSteps Monitor app and integrates with FirstSteps Nursery Management software, allowing managers to review observations before publishing them via the FirstSteps Parent Link app,

### FEATURES INCLUDE

- ❖ Observation recording using the onscreen keyboard or voice typing option
- ❖ Observation counts identifying children with no observations recorded, alongside the number of observations for all children
- ❖ Progress Tracker for able, confident and emerging reporting
- ❖ Cohort Tracker for comprehensive overviews in the seven areas of learning, with filters for date range, key person, funded children, EYPP children, and SEN
- ❖ Key person tracker
- ❖ Next steps function to view and add new targets
- ❖ Summative progress reports.

and also produce essential reports.

Staff have their own secure login credentials and access to specific areas and functions can be applied to individual users.

## FIRSTSTEPS MONITOR

Monitor is a tablet application for key persons to monitor and record the daily activity of each child.

It allows feeds, nappy changes, meals, sleep recording, medicine administration and attendance to be documented in real time, with the bonus that all information integrates seamlessly with FirstSteps.



### FEATURES INCLUDE

- ❖ Secure login with authorised users only access
- ❖ Child details, allergy and permissions information
- ❖ Real-time registers, recording times of children in and out of the room
- ❖ Observations of activity to capture and send to parents
- ❖ Daily diary events.

## FIRSTSTEPS PARENT LINK

This smartphone app is a fantastic way for parents and carers to communicate with your nursery, and could mean prospective customers choosing your setting over another. It offers peace of mind for worried parents who like to check from a distance what is happening to their little ones whilst in your care, too. Parents can review and comment on all the information from Monitor and access their child's learning journal, and you can also allow them to view their account, status, bookings, etc.

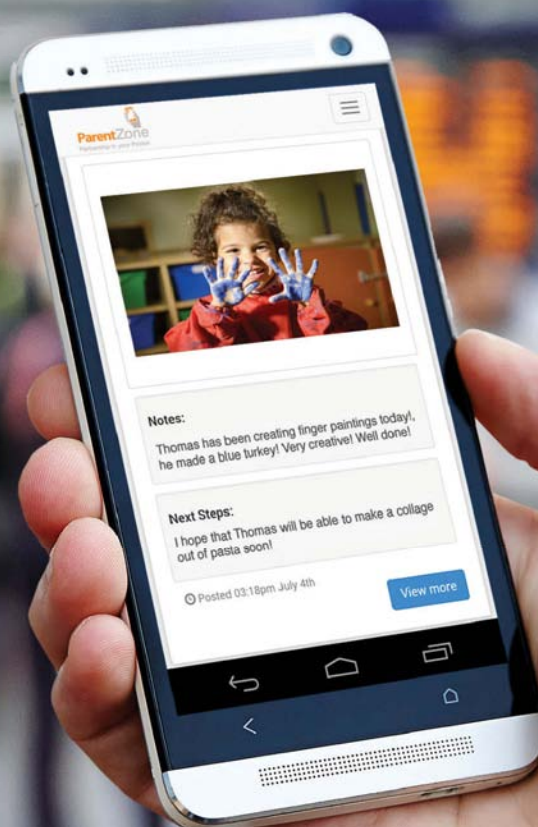


### FEATURES INCLUDE

- ❖ Viewing of child's daily diary
- ❖ Viewing of child's learning journal
- ❖ Account history
- ❖ Ability to comment on any events.

If you would like a presentation of FirstSteps, either online or by visit, to see what we can offer, how FirstSteps will work for you, and receive a personalised quotation, call 0845 470 0740 or email [info@firststeps.software](mailto:info@firststeps.software)

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# 5 WAYS SOFTWARE CAN BOOST YOUR EFFICIENCY

*Taking the high-tech approach to nursery management can save you time and money, says **Chris Reid**...*

## 1 Financial management

Nursery management software can incorporate payment and billing reporting tools, forecasts, targets and bank reconciliation functions to dramatically reduce the time your staff spend chasing late payments. Data can be exported into financial packages at the click of a button, and it makes it easier for parents to settle their invoices at any time of day or night. For nurseries operating over more than one site, managers can access financial information for one nursery or the whole chain quickly and easily, making it simple to run reports as and when they are needed.

As well as needing the passion to help children achieve their potential and reassure parents, today's nursery owners and managers need to be accountants, business development managers and HR specialists – all while keeping up to date with the latest Ofsted requirements. This can make leading a setting a stressful undertaking, but the latest developments in nursery management software can help to streamline the way your nursery operates, saving you time and money.

Account management and payment processing functions and communications, enquiry and staffing modules can all be combined to revolutionise the way you manage the running of your setting day to day and plan for the future – here are just some of the key ways software can boost your nursery's efficiency.

## 2 Parents partnerships

Working with parents is key to the success of any nursery, but it is often difficult to communicate important information to them when they are rushing off to work, or picking their children up. Management software can solve this by enabling you to send out newsletters, invoices, statements and information packs. This communication could be through an email or text message, and not only does it make it easier for you to send messages out, it is also more likely to be read and taken note of because mums and dads can access it in their own time.

## 3 FUTURE PROJECTION

Unanticipated phone calls or drop-ins from prospective parents can often catch you out in terms of your ability to confirm whether or not you have a place available for a child from a certain date. Advanced

enquiry modules in nursery management software mean you can access this information instantly, and run key reports on your future occupancy levels and income streams. Having this information to hand means you will never turn down a potential customer because of the wrong data.

## 4 Staff planning

Keeping your staff up to date with essential training qualifications and DBS checks is a full-time job in itself, but nursery management software can keep track of each individual staff member's training needs, their performance reviews and qualifications, and can help you to quickly produce weekly or monthly staff rotas and holiday lists, ensuring you always meet staff:child ratios.

## 5 GRANT MANAGEMENT

Whether children are entitled to 15 hours or 30 hours of funded childcare, and from the age of two or three, it can be difficult to correctly invoice parents for their unfunded hours and to monitor how much you should be claiming back from the government. Grant modules included in software can automatically calculate all of your early years funding and provide you with headcount reports instantly. This is something that will become more important for nurseries when the level of funded hours increases to 30 in 2017.



*Chris Reid is the CEO and owner of Connect Childcare.*

# WHAT DOES YOUR WEBSITE SAY ABOUT YOU?

*The internet is many parents' first port of call when sourcing a nursery, so it's vital your online presence gives them a good first impression, says **Richard Duddy**...*

**A**s a proud nursery owner or manager, you know the importance of a decent first impression. That's why you spent a chunk of your budget on the beautifully crafted sign at the front of your building, and why you put those attractive fairy lights in your window. However, have you considered that the internet has become many parents' first port of call when investigating which nursery they should send their children to?

The fact is that if you want to make a great first impression, you need to think about your digital presence – and a good place to start is your website...

## A STABLE PRESENCE

One of the benefits of having a website is that it can provide a great and stable platform for your digital profile. (Who knows what social media platform will be tomorrow's flavour?) You can use this to your advantage by including important information that you know your target audience wants and needs whatever the weather. A quick Twitter survey suggests this should cover:

- ❖ a logo and the name of your nursery;
- ❖ contact information: address, telephone, email, social media profiles;
- ❖ your opening hours and fees/rates.

Many nursery websites have just about that much. Unfortunately, basic static information will not do much to set you apart from other providers. If you're serious about attracting new customers you'll need to get a bit creative!

.....



Richard Duddy is Marketing Consultant at Astec Solutions Ltd. Follow @RikDuddy

## WIN HEARTS & MINDS

Choosing a suitable childcare provider is a decision parents (usually) take with great care, so you're going to need to engage both their hearts and minds. A well-crafted story that describes your philosophy and ethos of your setting is a good starting point. You should also communicate the reasons why people should choose your service over any other. State clearly what these benefits are.

- ❖ Perhaps you provide the best care in the area because of your highly qualified team?
- ❖ Maybe your setting is simply the most convenient for commuters because it is nearest to the station.

Add authority to these proclamations by providing proof. If your website says that you're an 'outstanding' provider, include a link to the Ofsted report with your 'outstanding' grade. If you state that "parents love us" include positive (real!) testimonials.

The battle for hearts and minds is not entirely rational, so you will need more than just text. Fortunately, a picture can tell a thousand words and a video

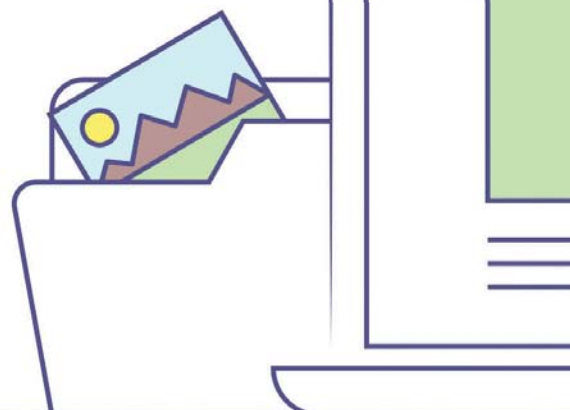
can tell even more – especially if it's put together by a professional. Images can play a big part in the look and feel of your website and, together with considerate design, can help show what your service is really all about!

## MAKE SURE IT WORKS!

An engaging website is a step in the right direction, but if you want to recruit and retain customers, it's also going to have to be *effective*.

There are a number of technical factors that go into making an effective website, such as making sure it loads

**If you do decide to use images of children that attend your nursery, make sure you have carried out a risk assessment and have permissions from parents. Remember that parents can change their mind at any time, so make sure you have a contingency should someone withdraw permission.**







quickly, works on multiple devices and is easy to use and find, but I will save those for discussion on another day. Here, we're going to focus on how the content you provide your target audience can help them turn from prospects into paying customers.

An effective website will support parents through the different stages of their 'customer journey'. Here's what I mean by that.

- 1 **RESEARCH:** A parent first investigates childcare approaches and options available in the area.
- 2 **CONSIDERING OPTIONS:** After the initial research, the parent knows more about childcare options and is preparing to make a purchase decision.
- 3 **CUSTOMER:** The parent purchases your childcare services and becomes a customer.
- 4 **ADVOCATE:** The customer recommends your service to other parents!

At each stage, a parent seeks different information. Your goal is therefore to provide them with the information and cues they need to move to the next stage. So at stage 1, help parents in their research by serving them answers through your website. For example, consider 'How can I access free funded childcare?' or 'Why should I choose the Montessori /Waldorf /Reggio Emilia approach?' You can even group valuable content into a guide that is accessible in return for subscribing to your blog. This means you'll have even more opportunities to set yourself up as the premier childcare provider in town.

Once a parent is interested in your services, you'll want to start serving them more service-specific content to make sure they choose you.

Think of ways to make each stage as easy as possible for the parent, such as including registration forms, the ability to book a viewing online and bright calls to action. For a fine example of this approach, pay a visit to Dizzy Ducks' award-winning website at [dizzyducks.co.uk](http://dizzyducks.co.uk)

## DON'T FORGET EXISTING CUSTOMERS

It costs less to retain a customer than it does to recruit a new one, so you should also consider how you can use your website to deepen relationships with parents. A great way to do so is through a 'Parent Portal' where a parent can log in to your website to access information about their child's progress, daily diaries, account information and more. There are a range of platforms that offer this functionality (including our own Prism nursery management software), and they are becoming increasingly popular with parents.

Happy paying parents can be great advocates for your service (see stage 4!), so make it easy for them to recommend your website to friends and to leave testimonials on the site!

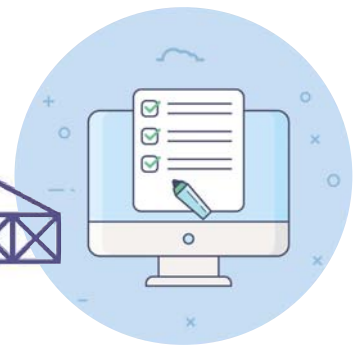
## EVERYTHING INTEGRATED

Before you plough ahead with an overhaul of your website, make sure you have considered your options as part of an integrated strategy that covers both traditional and digital tools (including social, email and advertising).

Your resources can only go so far, so you may need to make some difficult decisions. If you decide your front of house makeover is the more pressing need, you'll just have to hope that parents look up from their smartphone to see it!



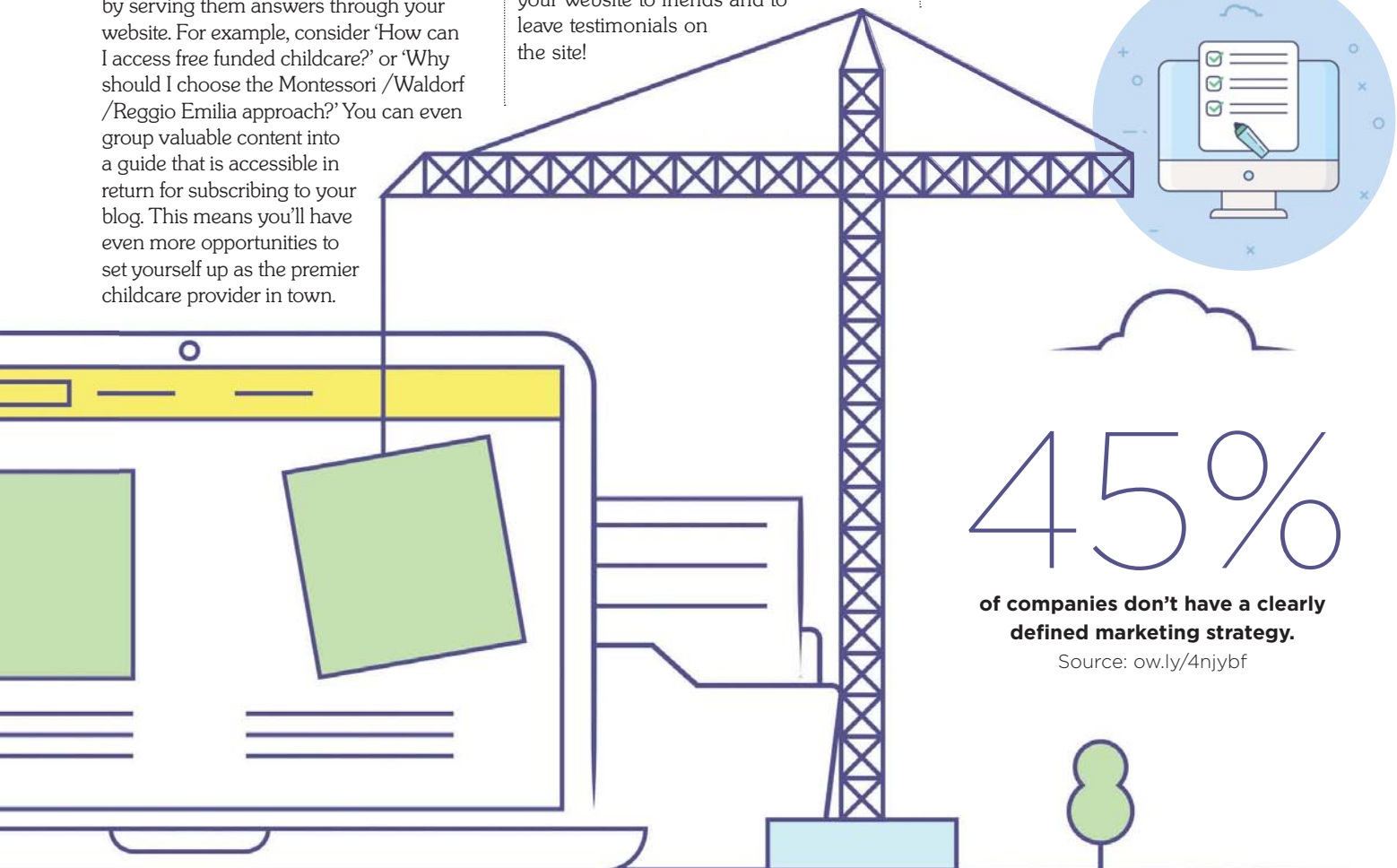
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# 45%

of companies don't have a clearly defined marketing strategy.

Source: [ow.ly/4njybf](https://ow.ly/4njybf)



# GOING SOCIAL

*Facebook, Twitter and the like are valuable marketing tools, but only if you use them properly, says **Kate Tyler**...*

**S**ocial media has been around a good few years now, but it can still cause some confusion. Using Facebook personally is one thing, but knowing which networks to use and how to get the best results for your setting can be a different matter entirely. If you don't know why you're using social media, you may as well not bother, so being focused on who you want to connect with and what you want to achieve are vital for success.

To set you on your way, here's a quick guide to the benefits and pitfalls of each network...

## FACEBOOK

Facebook is the most popular social network and the most powerful for nurseries. Having a Facebook page or group will allow you to post status updates, share photos and videos, and create events with all the people who like the page. It's a fantastic, highly visual communications tool that can be used to keep your current parents up to date whilst attracting potential parents with the range of activities you showcase.

### Good for:

- ❖ Sharing photos.
- ❖ Highlighting the wide range of activities you offer.
- ❖ Communicating with parents. Ofsted expects parents to be included and

well-informed, and Facebook is great for making this happen.

- ❖ Promoting the nursery.

### Safety tip:

- ❖ Make sure you have written consent from parents to use children's images on social networks.
- ❖ Avoid using children's names when you post pictures and stories.

## TWITTER

Twitter continues to attract new users and is unrivalled for breaking news, both locally and nationally. It's the only social network to post all updates (text, photo or video) in real time, which makes it great for sharing news about what you've done that day or an event happening soon. With tweets limited to 140 characters, it's short and sweet, and quite fast paced – ideal for a 'little-and-often' approach.

### Good for:

- ❖ Breaking news and real-time event coverage.
- ❖ Bite-sized tips and ideas.
- ❖ Quick updates.
- ❖ Sharing links.
- ❖ Connecting with other organisations, locally and nationally.

### Safety tip:

- ❖ Find out if your staff have Twitter profiles and monitor them.
- ❖ As with all the networks, make sure you have consent to share images.

## PINTEREST

Pinterest is intended to be a virtual pinboard for all the things you love. People create 'boards' based on different themes, and pin images onto each board. It's a great way of making your setting visual and sharing ideas and inspiration.

### Good for:

- ❖ Influencing and inspiring.
- ❖ Showing images from the nursery that drive traffic back to your website.
- ❖ Showing what ideas and values are important to the nursery (e.g. creating a board on Outdoor Play or Favourite Books, etc.).
- ❖ Targeting parents (mothers especially).
- ❖ Busy nurseries – the pins don't have a time/date attached, so you don't need to be active on it every day

### Safety tip:

- ❖ Make sure all staff are clear on your values and expectations if you give them permission to pin images.

## YOUTUBE

YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world. It's immensely popular and affects your online search rankings. Many people prefer watching a short video to reading, so creating video on a regular basis can be a great way of promoting your nursery.

**Everyone involved should enjoy what social media can offer; have fun with it!**







### Good for:

- ❖ Improving your search engine rankings.
- ❖ Showing instead of telling.
- ❖ Giving prospective parents an insight.
- ❖ Showcasing outings and special events.

### Safety tip:

- ❖ Have tight regulations in place about what video footage your staff can and can't record and share. The policy should be included within your codes of conduct.
- ❖ Canvass parental opinion about use of video sharing beforehand and consider having a private channel just for parents if people have concerns.

## BLOGS

A blog is basically the news section of your website. It's a great way of sharing news and events from the nursery, and showing parents and prospective parents what you've been up to. Most importantly, it gives people a reason to keep coming back to your website. If you start a blog, it does need to be regularly maintained, however. Once a week is ideal – but no less than once a month.

### Good for:

- ❖ PR.
- ❖ Going into more detail about the great things you do.
- ❖ Giving prospective parents an insight.
- ❖ Showcasing outings and special events.
- ❖ Getting people to visit your website.
- ❖ Improving your search engine rankings (Google likes fresh content).

### Safety tip:

- ❖ Avoid naming specific children in your blog posts.

## INSTAGRAM

Instagram is a picture-sharing site that can only be used on mobile devices. The idea is to share images and pictures of that instant, but because of this it does pose safeguarding risks for early years settings.

### Good for:

- ❖ Sharing images.

### Safety tip:

- ❖ Never take, store or share photos of children on a personal mobile device.

## LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is designed to connect people and share their skills and experience for professional purposes. It can be a useful tool for nurseries when recruiting new staff or if their parents are largely working professionals. Ideally the nursery owner or manager would be the main ambassador on LinkedIn, possibly with a company page as well.

### Good for:

- ❖ Networking.
- ❖ Recruitment, especially senior staff.
- ❖ Connecting with parents and potential parents in a professional manner.

### Safety tip:

- ❖ Have a pre-written paragraph that all employees post on their LinkedIn profiles that describes the nursery, to ensure consistency.

# HAVE A PLAN

### ALWAYS REMEMBER TO...

- ❖ Be clear on why you're using social media and what you hope to achieve.
- ❖ Have a strong social media policy in place so that staff are clear on what they can and can't do. You have to protect your reputation at all times.
- ❖ Make sure all staff have proper, professional training on using social media that covers safeguarding, Ofsted requirements, school readiness and effective communication with parents.
- ❖ Weigh up the time it will take to set up and manage each network with time available, and consider outsourcing it if you're unable to commit to regular activity.
- ❖ Keep safeguarding in mind at all times. Collect parental consent for online publication of images before you start, and ensure staff and parents are aware of what you plan to do.
- ❖ Check the spelling, punctuation, grammar and appropriateness of your posts before sharing. You are promoting an educational environment and need to be seen to be professional.



Kate Tyler is Managing Director at Shake Social, a social media agency specialising in the early years sector. Her team

always start with a targeted strategy and then go on to build meaningful online communities for clients. They offer strategy, training and management to a range of nurseries across the UK. For more information, call 0115 901 7357, email [info@shakesocial.co.uk](mailto:info@shakesocial.co.uk) or visit [shakesocial.co.uk](http://shakesocial.co.uk)

# Talking technology

**NB: For starters, can you please give us a quick run-down of how Capture Education actually works?**

**PC:** In short, it enables nurseries to digitally capture children's progression as opposed to using traditional paper-based methods. Within the system these can then be mapped against key developmental milestones, and be made available as assessment evidence to Ofsted. It's as simple as taking a photo and attaching it to a child and their progress – all digitally – so no duplication of effort or additional administration time.

**NB: What could a nursery typically expect to pay for the system?**

**PC:** Currently we're offering a three-month free trial. Any nurseries that take up this offer can then benefit from a reduced monthly rate for six months. Aside from the cost saving this free trial represents, many of our customers have made huge savings elsewhere as the result of using Capture.

**NB: So what's included in the free trial exactly?**

**PC:** From a technology perspective,

*Nursery Business speaks to Paul Campbell at Capture Education to find out more about the company's digital learning journal...*



everything that a nursery would access if they were a paying customer. This means unlimited children and teacher accounts, unlimited observations and reports, as well as access to the parent portal – all hosted on a secure UK server and database. We'll even set up the new accounts and provide free email support.

**NB: Sounds like a pretty incredible offer – why are you making this available?**

**PC:** We believe in the benefits of the system – and so do all of the customers who have already started using Capture Education. But we also recognise that making the move from paper to digital can be a bit daunting and poses a certain level of risk regarding financial commitment. We just want to give nurseries the chance to give it a go – in a meaningful way.

**NB: Where can nurseries sign up for the free trial?**

**PC:** Simply visit our website – [www.capture-education.co.uk/nb](http://www.capture-education.co.uk/nb)

**NB:** That's great – thanks for your time, Paul.

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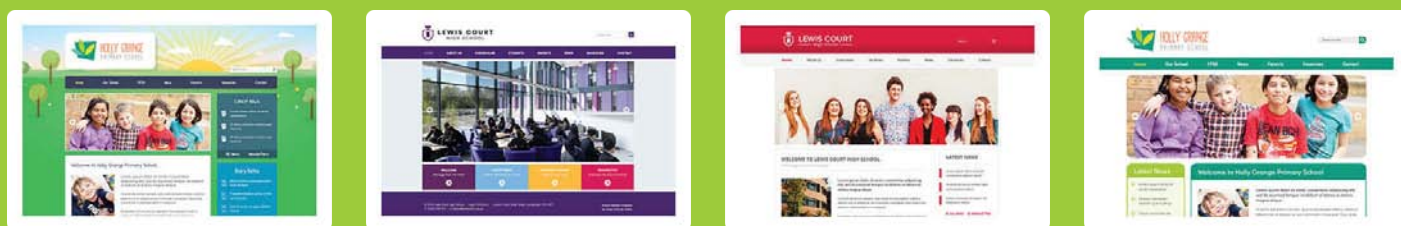


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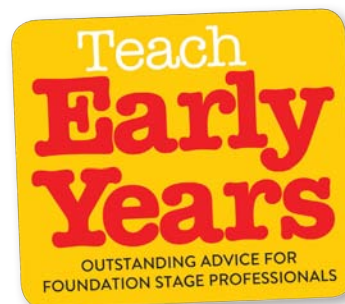
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# Healthy & hassle-free

*Little Tums can deliver tasty and nutritious food to your nursery with a minimum of fuss. Charlie Hall answers our questions on what is an increasingly popular service...*

## Q WHAT SERVICE DOES LITTLE TUMS PROVIDE TO NURSERY SETTINGS?

A Little Tums provide a well-organised and reliable lunch and tea service for children's nursery schools and preschools. We take the hassle out of lunchtime, by providing hot, healthy meals that are ready to serve, leaving staff free to utilise their time in other ways.

## Q WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF WORKING WITH LITTLE TUMS, AS OPPOSED TO PREPARING MEALS ON-SITE?

A Once we've received your order, we take care of everything. That means staff no longer need to worry about sourcing ingredients, updating menus, storing ingredients, providing alternatives for dietary requests, and updating allergen information – or, of course, the cooking of meals and dishing up of individual lunch boxes, which can be very time consuming. Many of our settings have seen an increase in the productivity of their staff as a result.

Because our menus are independently checked by our local authority to ensure they meet the healthy guidelines for children of nursery school age, parents and staff can be confident that they are promoting healthy eating habits, too. It's very difficult to regulate what parents put into a lunch box, but Little Tums meals offer the reassurance that children are receiving a healthy, balanced and nutritious meal.

The service also helps to prepare children for school meal times, by allowing them to experience the group dynamics of eating the same meal together. This encourages children to try different taste and textures, something they are much more willing to do when they see their friends trying and eating different things.

## Q WHAT DOES A TYPICAL LITTLE TUMS MENU INCLUDE?

A Our current menus are available to view on our website ([littletums.co.uk](http://littletums.co.uk)). We update our menus every six months to make use of seasonal ingredients, and offer a three-week rolling summer and winter menu.

We aim to encourage healthy eating habits from a young age, and this involves enabling children to try different tastes and textures from around the world. Getting them used to a range of different foods from a young age will result in them being less hesitant to try new things as they grow up.

We source all our meat and vegetables from a supplier local to our kitchen. Our local butcher only sources meat from Red tractor-licensed farms, which ensure the minimum UK welfare standards are exceeded when it comes to humane animal slaughter and responsible sourcing of meat products. The fish we use is MSC-certified, meaning it comes from responsible and ethical fisheries, and all our eggs are free range.

## Q DOES LITTLE TUMS CATER FOR SPECIAL DIETS?

A We cater for every dietary requirement you can think of, as well as combined allergies. We always keep the dishes as close as possible to the regular meals so children don't feel singled out.

## Q HOW ARE LITTLE TUMS MEALS DELIVERED, AND HOW MUCH NOTICE IS REQUIRED TO PLACE AN ORDER?

A We have a fleet of vehicles that cover the South East of England and London, and we ask our settings to place their order every Thursday before the Monday they require their meals. Upon commencement Little Tums sends out electronic order forms, which are very easy to fill in – they can be emailed to us or sent back with the delivery driver.

## Q HOW COST-EFFECTIVE IS SOURCING MEALS THROUGH LITTLE TUMS?

A We charge a flat fee for all our meals, including dietary meals, and we keep this fee cheaper than providing a healthy packed lunch. This allows settings to incorporate the cost of a Little Tums lunch into their fees and invest in meals for the whole setting if they wish to. If parents sign up individually for meals instead, it makes invoicing much more streamlined, too.

**To find out more about Little Tums or to place an order for your setting, call 01273 640 596 or visit [littletums.co.uk](http://littletums.co.uk)**







# MARKETING WITH YOUR MENU

*Providing nutritious food is a vital part of a nursery's role, but it's an area in which many settings struggle to shine. Get it right, and you can get a head start on the competition, says **Nigel Denby**...*



**Y**our nursery needs a unique selling proposition, or USP, if it's to compete in an increasingly crowded sector. Your USP is that essential difference in your marketing messages that sets you apart from the rest – and it could be, literally, yours on a plate.

Your setting's food offering says more about your understanding and knowledge of children, their health and care needs than almost any other service you provide. Get it right, and your worries about occupancy could be a thing of the past. Think about it: you'll rarely hear a mum telling her friend that the nursery helped her toddler learn to tie his shoe laces, but just see what she's saying when

the nursery manages to get her son to eat Brussels sprouts, sardines or curly kale!

## FOOD IN EARLY YEARS

The early years are when children learn about their relationship with food, develop lifelong preferences and lay down the foundations for their adult health. For those children in full-time daycare, the greatest influencer for food is the care provider. If you're a parent, there are few more emotive subjects than how well your child eats when it comes to their wellbeing. Issues range from the latest weaning techniques, to concerns over whether little Johnny has a dairy intolerance to whether he will become

malnourished if he refuses to eat broccoli, and all can cause a great deal of anxiety. This is exacerbated by parents feeling increasingly isolated and unsupported when it comes to feeding their children. The extended family on the doorstep is more often than not being replaced by childcare providers. Yet, in a recent Mumsnet survey of parents, 66% said they were unhappy about the quality of their child's nursery food.

All of which means if you can make your food offering stand out from the crowd, you'll give parents a great reason to choose your setting. The good news is that getting food and nutrition right for the under-fives isn't rocket science – here are some tips on ensuring your menu is worth shouting about...



*If you can make your food offering stand out from the crowd, you'll give parents a great reason to choose your setting.*

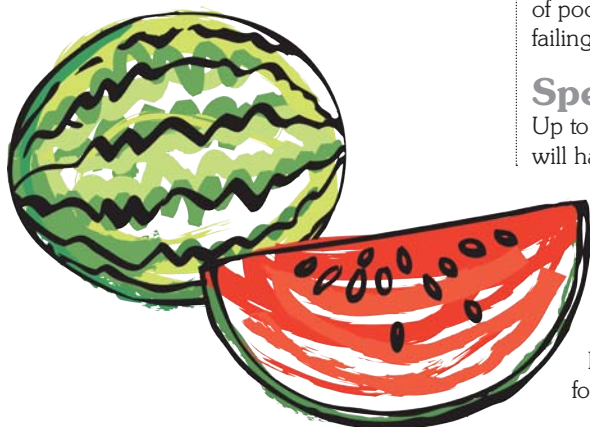


## IMPROVING STANDARDS

Upgrading, or even replacing, your current food offering can seem daunting, but a lot can be achieved by taking baby steps. The first thing you need to do is establish your baseline. You can do that by looking at your food objectively and asking yourself some straightforward questions:

- ❖ How do you rate your food offering?
- ❖ What's your priority around food – quality or your bottom line?
- ❖ Would you be happy for your own children to receive most of their nutrition in the first years of life from your setting?

How you answer will dictate how much needs to change, and where you should focus your attention.



When the time comes to make changes, keep in mind that good-quality nursery food needs to fulfil a number of criteria:

### Nutritionally balanced

Your food needs to provide more than 70% of the children's daily nutrient requirements – that's 70% of the calories, protein, fruit and veg, and of course all the vitamins and minerals they need to be healthy. Menus need enough servings of red meat, dairy foods and fish each day and throughout the week to meet recommendations, and they must deliver all of this while not providing too much salt, sugar or fibre for toddlers.

### Portion-controlled

Your food needs to be served in the right amounts to help children meet their nutritional needs but remain at a healthy weight. Almost 30% of under-fives are overweight and another 20% are at risk of poor nutritional status. Could you be failing half the children in your care?

### Special diets

Up to 7% of the children in your care will have a potentially fatal food allergy – a minute trace of contaminated food could trigger anaphylaxis. Do you think your food allergy management is watertight?

### Good enough to eat

Don't forget to take a look at your food waste bins after meal service. If

you are throwing away food, is it because the children are being fed too much or given too large a snack? Are your practitioners encouraging them to eat and leading by example? Or does the food just not taste good?

## INVEST IN TRAINING

As well as considering what's emerging from your kitchen, you should also pay attention to the profile food and nutrition has in your setting. Cooks, practitioners and leaders all need to respect and value food as part of cohesive, high-quality childcare. It should be remembered that mealtimes are opportunities for learning and development, and all staff need to understand their role in helping children eat well.

Part of the problem for nurseries is that nursery cooks don't need to have formal qualifications in cooking, and early years practitioners receive very little training in child nutrition. Essentially, you may not have anyone working in your setting who knows anything about preparing healthy meals for the under-fives. Look at your training budget and see how much of your spend is related to food in the last year. Chances are that if there was any food-related training it was for food hygiene and food safety. Investing in acquiring nutritional expertise for your team will make a real difference.

## SHARE YOUR WORK

Once you are confident that your food and nutrition offer is something you are proud of, you need to shout about it:





- ❖ Invite parents for lunch occasionally, so they can see the quality of your food.
- ❖ Share your food provenance through notice boards, newsletters and social media.
- ❖ If you buy from local producers, engage with some cross-marketing to help both businesses.
- ❖ Share your most popular recipes with parents to cook at home.
- ❖ Offer master-classes for parents to get top tips on feeding their children from your cook.

The ways to celebrate excellence and attention to detail in your food are endless – just be creative. Without a doubt, if your food is right it's the perfect vehicle to get mums and dads talking about your nursery for all the right reasons – and that is marketing that you can't afford to ignore.



*If you want to find out more about free early years food and nutrition resources or*

*bespoke training and nutritional support, contact Nigel Denby RD, Grub4Life's Head of Nutrition, at [feedback@grub4life.com](mailto:feedback@grub4life.com)*

## EXPERT SUPPORT



**A PARTNERSHIP WITH ANNABEL KARMELO IS BOOSTING FENNIES DAY NURSERIES' BUSINESS, AS DIRECTOR OF CHILDCARE SERVICES, JOHN WARREN, EXPLAINED...**

### WHY DID YOU APPROACH ANNABEL TO WORK WITH FENNIES?

**JW:** Over the last 30 years I've witnessed at first hand how important our food is to parents. In the past I'd contacted many nutritionists with a view to developing our food offering, but although their knowledge was excellent, they couldn't provide the package we wanted.

This led me to think about who in the sector was trusted and could help us. When my children were little they were brought up on Annabel Karmel's recipes; I knew that if we could convince Annabel to join us it would be a huge investment, but that having such a name attached to Fennies would pay for itself in terms of the quality of our food and increased occupancy levels.

### HOW DID THE PARTNERSHIP DEVELOP?

**JW:** After many conversations with Annabel's PA we agreed a meeting and started developing our programme. Initially our MD asked if we could just create menus using Annabel's many cookery books, but we needed a hook to draw people in. I know that many people with an early years head on find marketing difficult, but I believe the most important thing before you try to sell your product is to believe in your product – and our product is high-quality childcare and education.

There were two main aspects to talk about: the menus Annabel would provide and the help she would give us as an added tool for marketing our nurseries. Discussions and work for both ran parallel to each other. Our head chef worked with Annabel to develop the menus, and then our external marketing team at Shooting Star PR worked with her team to develop the programme. Once contracts were signed we let our parents know what would be happening and when. Managers were instructed to feed this news into every subsequent 'show round' visit, and as the investment was high we sent in secret shoppers to ensure that they were doing just that.

### HOW ARE THINGS GOING, AND WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS?

**JW:** Now the programme is up and running recipes are being shared with parents, and Annabel has complete buy-in from Fennies. At our recent Day of Excellence she spoke to staff and spent time with the chefs helping to prepare the meal on the day for 200 people. There are plans for Annabel to attend open days for prospective parents, and we are currently in discussion with a training provider to upskill our chefs.

The investment in money, time and effort has been immense for us, but the outcome for the health and wellbeing of our children, and the benefits in attracting and retaining parents, will I'm sure outweigh the cost. We factored in at the start how many new families we would need to attract to cover the investment – the target was a manageable one and, we feel, worth the risk. **Visit [fennies.com](http://fennies.com)**



**1 in 5 children start Reception overweight.**

**What will you do to help?**



## Healthy Children, Bright Futures

Addressing Key Health Issues for Under 5s

### National Conference

Thursday 16 June 2016  
Grand Connaught Rooms,  
Holborn, London

#### Speakers include:

- Alison Burton,  
Public Health England
- Dr Lala Manners,  
activematters
- Dr. Patricia Mucavele,  
Children's Food Trust
- Sue Robb, 4Children



**Visit [www.4children.org.uk](http://www.4children.org.uk) for more details or to book your place**

**'Safeguarding Children in Your Care is a Priority' and is today's hot topic of conversation.**



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# ARE YOU AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE?

*Nurseries must deliver job satisfaction and a happy working environment to recruit great staff, says **Emma Rooney**...*

**H**ard-pressed early years providers getting to grips with rising wage costs and government underfunding may believe they're fighting a losing battle when it comes to recruiting and retaining talented staff. But if competitive pay, benefits and profit-sharing top most employees' wish lists, 'job satisfaction' and 'workplace happiness' are a close second. In fact, in the latest Investors in People workforce survey, poor management and 'feeling undervalued' both outrank pay as reasons for unhappiness at work, with one in eight saying they just want to be told 'thank you' more.

As such, employers need to be more proactive and creative in managing staff, to entice recruits and encourage them to stay.

## Offer a career

Happy workplaces are born in a shared vision of what must be done individually and collectively to achieve company goals, which in turn keep stress levels to a minimum. A comprehensive induction process underpinned by a competency framework, with clearly defined performance expectations, career pathways and training opportunities, will not only focus employees on what's required on a daily basis, but also their long-term prospects.

Active mentoring means talent is identified early and training can be tailored to individual requirements, like the 20-month programme we've introduced to deliver GCSE maths or English alongside the Level 3 Diploma in Early Learning and Childcare, or our Culture and Leadership Programme, ensuring that colleagues are prepared for 'next-stage' career opportunities before they arise.

Creating appropriate positions for the newly skilled or qualified will always be difficult, but supported employees enjoying quality training are more likely to stay with your company.

## Provide a platform

Giving employees a range of forums to express their views and ideas, and involving them in the decision-making



process, creates a climate that promotes innovation and quality. More importantly, employees contributing to policy both ensure new initiatives are workable and are invested in making them successful.

Employee-elected representatives – we have the Partnership Council – can canvass opinion, elicit ideas, interpret policy and provide valuable insight into company-wide morale. Their work, supplemented by staff surveys, can help ensure informed decision-making at all levels.

## Support development

The value of investment in an employee's personal growth, with opportunities to broaden their horizons or undertake a physical or intellectual challenge, shouldn't be underestimated. An energised and motivated individual is better equipped to meet workplace challenges and provide a positive influence to colleagues.

Our 'Once in a Lifetime Experiences' have enabled company-sponsored teams to take part in the Chicago Marathon; conquer Kilimanjaro, the world's tallest free-standing mountain; and conduct training sessions in South African townships, where past fundraising has provided day care facilities.

A full calendar of social events

and regular 'fun' fundraising events strengthens the bonds between practitioners and provides the added 'feel-good' factor of making a difference to a worthwhile cause. A recent 'sleep-out' in our head office car park by 79 practitioners, managers and senior staff not only raised about £7,000 for the Children's Air Ambulance, but saw participants entertaining each other with impromptu singing performances.

## Mark achievements

Company award ceremonies for high achievers – we have our 'Best of the Best' Annual Awards Dinner – should be the highlight in a year spent recognising individual contributions with, for example, gifts for the idea that improved efficiency or a prize for the team creating the best imaginative environment to support child-led interests in a nursery challenge.

Rewarding long service, celebrating new qualifications or simply providing pizza and chocolate for after-hours meetings is an investment in staff wellbeing with far-reaching benefits.

Not only are happy employees more productive and loyal, they're a great advertisement for a business, and with 'reputation as a good employer' ranking in the top three considerations for job-seekers, they're an invaluable recruitment aid.

**Childbase Partnership ([childbasepartnership.com](http://childbasepartnership.com)) is a leading UK provider of childcare and early years education, holder of *The Sunday Times* 'Best for Giving Back' Award, and one of only 165 UK organisations to be awarded three-star 'Extraordinary' status by Best Companies, the workplace engagement specialists – five years running.**



Emma Rooney is Operations Director at Childbase Partnership.

# We need more men!

*By not doing more to recruit male practitioners, we're letting our children down and ignoring what the public wants, says **David Wright**...*

**R**ing the doorbell of most early years settings and the chances are you will be greeted by a woman, whose colleagues will be female – in most cases, exclusively. The fact is that less than 2% of the early years workforce in the UK is male, and it has been that way for many years. So what? Does it matter to society, to children, to their carers, to my team and indeed to my business? As a man who co-owns and works in a small family-run group of day nurseries, I'm not able to provide an unbiased, objective or unequivocal answer. But I can offer my opinions based on experience and the evidence gained from active engagement with this issue over the last 12 years working directly with children, parents and practitioners.

## CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES

Firstly, I think it's helpful to consider some of the issues affecting our culture. It's very easy for us to stereotype. We are, after all, the product of our own individual upbringing with all its social mores and prejudices. In this context, gender often has more to do with a set of preconceptions than with biology. We have certain expectations of men and women in terms of their behaviours and roles. We associate a set of notional characteristics (masculinity and femininity) with each, deeming women to be more nurturing and men as the risktakers. I often hear the term 'male role model' used. It is a singular term, so what does he look like? Is my male role model the same as yours?

We receive confusing messages over our role in the early years sector. Are we caring for children, educating them, or minding them as an expedient for women to participate in the workforce and contribute to tax revenues? I'm not sure our government is clear about this. On the one hand, the recent change in terminology to



'educators' and 'teachers', coupled with the drive to raise entry-level criteria, supports a move towards professionalising what we do. Does this provide an opportunity to redefine roles away from the former, arguably pejorative term of 'childcarer' with its historical 'hair or care' connotations? At the same time, the headline offer to parents is still free childcare: we don't care who does it as long as they're cheap!

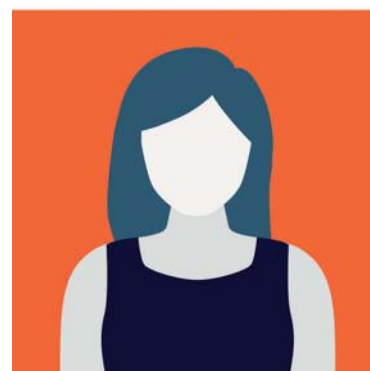
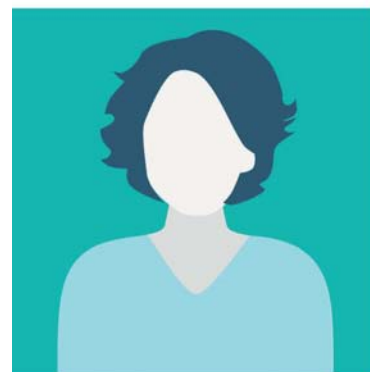
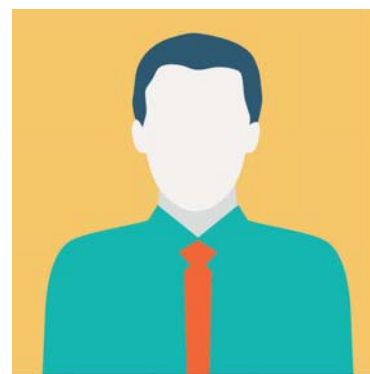
It's my contention that we're engaged in the most important job role, shaping and developing the minds and character of the next generation in their formative years. Why wouldn't we, as a society, want the best women and men to do this? Effectively excluding men from the early years workforce is denying our children the opportunity for the widest range of experiences based on a spectrum of diverse character types. We need the best people for the job. As things stand, 50% of potential candidates are currently unavailable to us. At a time when we're struggling to recruit, isn't

this an untapped resource?

Research indicates that public opinion overwhelmingly supports men working in early years. When polled, nearly 98% of parents stated that they were happy for men to care for their 3-5 year olds (Preschool Learning Alliance survey, 2011). Similarly female practitioners acknowledge the difference a mixed-gender workforce makes.

## THE STRUGGLE TO RECRUIT

So why are men not rushing to join us? Low pay and status are often cited, as well as the challenges of joining a 'woman's world' with the associated isolation and uncertainty over identity, and being the focus for potential suspicion over motivation – *why would any man want to work with young children?* Over and above all of these, early years is not on the careers radar for males. It would be most unusual for a boy to consider nursery work as a career ambition.







When I grow up I want to be a footballer, spaceman, computer games designer, etc. (there are those stereotypes again) maybe, but typically not a nursery practitioner. Teachers, careers advisers, parents and friends will generally not be supportive and can often be obstructive – “You’re better than that!”

And yet, I speak to many men who have chosen a career in early years and recognise the fulfilment found in a vocation that enables them to make a difference in children’s lives. Typically, these are men who have fallen into a role. Maybe they volunteered, helped out or experienced opportunities via a relative. Whatever the route in, they found that essential element that arises out of connectedness and relationship with young children, and this was sufficient motivation to keep them there. They get it. They are passionate advocates for their calling. They understand both the privilege and the enormous responsibility of their daily duties.

Children casually tell their parents the names of their male and female carers. The rest of the team attest to the difference it makes having men in the workforce, and parents tell their friends with pride that their child has a male keyworker. The culture starts to change.

## THE FUTURE

To borrow a quote, I have a dream – that one day it will be normal for boys and girls to be cared for by men and women in equal proportions. There will be no more discussion of ‘men in early years’. Early years teaching will be afforded the status it deserves, paid accordingly and attract the best men and women who can work in this role and support their household.

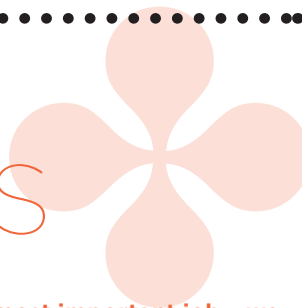
In the meantime, what can we do?

Recognise where we’re starting from. It’s no use advertising jobs expecting men to apply. They don’t. We need to work with schools and colleges. We need to change our own attitudes and take positive action to encourage and support job applications from men as well as women. If men won’t come to us, we need to go out and find them. But, we must only employ the best person for the job. We need to build on success. Who already employs men, and what lessons can we learn from them?



*David Wright is the owner of Paint Pots Nursery Group (paintpotsnursery.co.uk). He has published a Men in Early Years charter, setting out a commitment to working towards a gender-balanced workforce, and settings are being encouraged to sign it and display it for all to see. Download it from [bit.ly/21h261F](http://bit.ly/21h261F)*

# THE ARGUMENTS



## WHY DO WE NEED MALE PRACTITIONERS?

- ✿ Arguably working with young children is our most important job – we need to ensure the best people are in place.
- ✿ Equal opportunity – men have a right to work with children, children have the right to be cared for by men and women; and if this happens, we have more chance of meeting all children’s needs.
- ✿ Having the best practitioners available means improved outcomes for children.
- ✿ It’s good for business! With parents overwhelmingly in favour of seeing more men employed in nurseries, why not help your setting stand out from the crowd and support children’s development at the same time?

# Help with hygiene

*Smudge & Dribble can help you keep every part of your setting germ-free...*

## Q HOW LONG HAS SMUDGE & DRIBBLE BEEN SUPPLYING THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR?

A For 21 years the early years sector has been the primary focus for Smudge & Dribble. Having initially specialised in cleaning essentials, gloves and disposable paper products, our range now incorporates nappies, feeding essentials and first aid.

## Q WHY IS GOOD HYGIENE IMPORTANT FOR NURSERY SETTINGS?

A Hygiene is essential throughout nursery settings, reducing the risk of cross infection from child to child and between child and adult. Children in nurseries come into physical contact with people, furniture and toys during the day, which leads to the spread of germs if the environment is not cleaned on a regular basis. With infections spreading through the air and from

contact with surfaces, it is not always possible to completely prevent cross infection, but a hygienic environment should lead to minimal spread.

It is also beneficial to promote the development of hygienic habits amongst children from an early age, for example, washing hands with soap and wiping noses on tissues.

## Q HOW MUCH CHOICE ARE YOU ABLE TO OFFER?

A Whatever the area you need the product, we have something to suit, be it for the kitchen, washrooms or more general areas. For instance, in kitchens you need fragrance-free, non-tainting cleaning products, whereas in washrooms it's good to have something with a perfume to distract from unwelcome odours.

When it comes to paper towels it is generally down to preference and budget. We stock a wide range, from 1ply recycled blue to 3ply white paper towels.

A great all-round product is the

centre-feed paper roll. These can be used in the kitchen, wiping surfaces and even little hands in the washrooms.

## Q HOW CAN NURSERIES ORDER FROM SMUDGE & DRIBBLE, AND WHAT DELIVERY SERVICE IS OFFERED?

A Ordering is very easy – either call us free on **0800 980 2774** and speak to Denise and Sian in the office, visit **smudge-dribble.com** or email **sales@smudge-dribble.com**. We provide free next-day delivery on orders over £30.



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Disposable Flannels!



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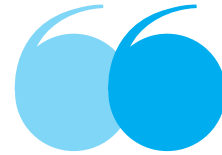
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# TRAIN THEM YOURSELF

*When money is tight, delivering CPD in-house is an effective way to improve your practitioners' skills, says **Kirstine Beeley**...*



***Bear in mind that, like the children, your staff will all have different learning styles.***

**P**roviding elements of your training in-house offers both a cost-effective alternative to sending staff members on external courses, and a chance to tailor the training to your setting's individual needs – you can ensure that all staff hear the same message, and issues affecting your nursery can be worked out as a team. For in-house training to have an impact you need to have a clear vision of what you are trying to achieve. An action plan for the year, including information from management meetings, areas of concern drawn from progress data and areas for development identified from staff reviews and appraisals, should give you an overview of what areas your setting needs to target and make training worthwhile and relevant going forward.

## UPSKILLING YOUR TEAM

For owners/managers considering in-house training I would recommend sending staff on external training that they have a personal passion for, and then asking them to deliver the information back to their colleagues as a prerequisite to your investment in their training and professional progression (enthusiasm is infectious!). Hearing training information from lots of different sources makes staff meetings less tedious and gives them a clear focus without the pressure

of responsibility falling on the same shoulders. At the same time this will build a shared sense of ownership and respect for what you are all working hard to achieve. It's sensible to send two staff members on training together so that they can discuss it at source and then share the load of redelivery to colleagues.

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

If funds are really tight then you will have to make sure that your own knowledge and bank of ideas is up to date, whether by attending courses, completing online training or reading and following media. Delivering these ideas to your staff needs to inspire them and make sense in an everyday situation. So once you have your basic knowledge I would suggest finding some practical examples of activities that the rest of the staff can use to get your point across – exploring rainbow rice and cutting spaghetti as a staff team has much more impact on their understanding of fine motor development than watching lots of PowerPoint slides.

Try to make sure that everything you say is directly related to your setting, and bear in mind that, like the children, your staff will all have different learning styles – hence try to include visual and practical ideas as well as just talking. Wherever possible aim to include some aspect of movement into your training; this engages your physical learners and

holds the attention of other staff.

If the information you are trying to get across cannot be easily turned into a practical, fun example then try using photos as a prompt for discussion – and if all else fails, make up a quiz so staff have a chance to discuss and develop their knowledge in a fun way. Remember, most in-house training is delivered after a full day's work, so you need to keep your already-tired staff engaged and focused. Try to get staff moving around, even if it's in between activities; this breaks up the session, maintains people's interest and makes remembering information easier.

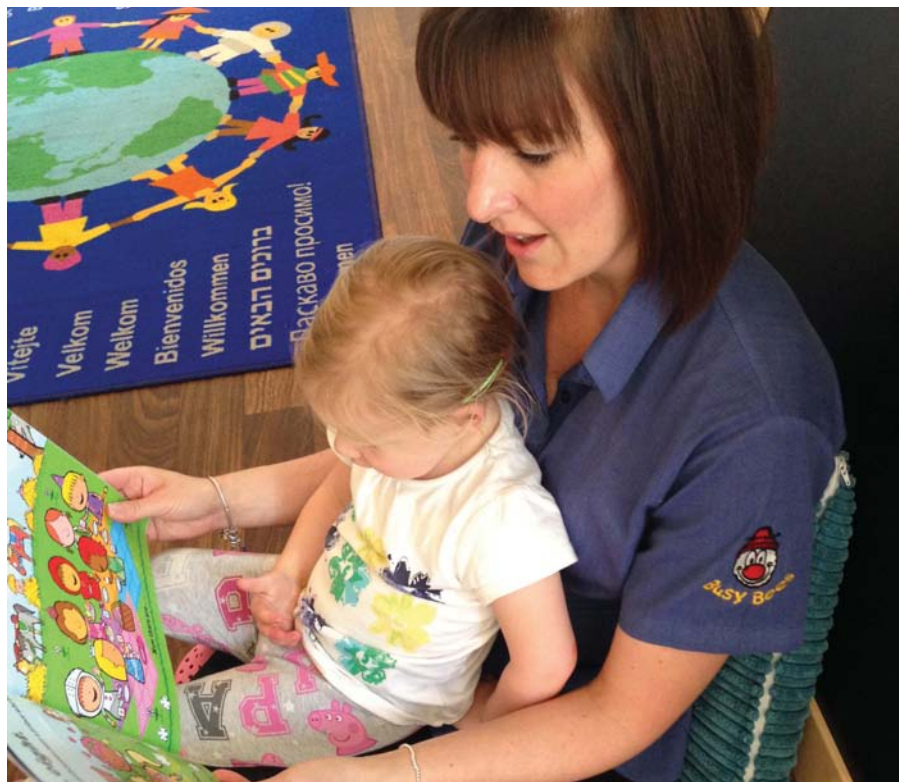
If all else fails, or if you lack the confidence to deliver training yourself, why not consider buying in a training consultant to deliver training but offer paid places to other settings within your network or locality? By charging a small fee you can very quickly cover your own overheads and build your own reputation as a provider of high-quality training locally.



*Kirstine Beeley is an author and educational consultant. Visit [playingtolearnuk.com](http://playingtolearnuk.com)*

# Developing outstanding staff

*Busy Bees Training's **Fay Gibbin** explains how and why Busy Bees is growing and upskilling its team and practitioners in the sector beyond...*



**T**he demand for early years childcare in the UK is rising, and quality providers are having to pull out all the stops in order to meet the need for highly trained staff. At Busy Bees we reap the benefits of growing our own skilled workforce. We recruit personalities, people who share our values and vision, and believe that by empowering our staff teams with exceptional skills and knowledge, they will inherit the company's philosophy and goals.

Our training strategy is aligned with the projected growth and development of the company. Robust recruitment and talent management is essential to carry out our plans, as is senior management buy in and total staff commitment. Everyone has to agree on what we're trying to achieve and understand what success looks like. To us, a successful, sustainable nursery is one that has an experienced manager at the helm and an ever-replenishing supply of devoted, creative childcare practitioners at every level, committed to providing better

outcomes for every child. Of course, it goes without saying, ultimate success is a nursery full of healthy, happy, engaged children and content, happy parents.

Therefore, as we grow, our number one challenge is to fill our nurseries with the 'right people'. Our strategy is simple: we grow our own. We train and nurture talent, continuously. We're fortunate to be in the unique position of being able to train in-house with government funding and approval to deliver a range of courses through the Awarding Organisation Skillsfirst. But we need to keep looking for our future shining stars so that we can create an ever-flowing pipeline of talent.

## THE RIGHT QUALIFICATIONS

In a competitive employment market saturated with young, qualified and ambitious job-seekers, the childcare industry has to provide attractive training opportunities and interesting and varied career development paths to 16-18-year-olds. But it's imperative that

we are attracting the personalities that will cope with the responsibility, and rise to the daily challenges, of caring for, and educating, young children.

It is important that those who dedicate their lives to working with children achieve good results in English and maths, and we are committed to helping those individuals who did not reach the required levels in school for whatever reason. However, it is equally important that childcare practitioners gain academic and practical industry-appropriate qualifications, and receive continual training that supports them to deliver the very best childcare and early years education.

The value of training is twofold: it enables companies that are looking to grow to upskill their workforce, and it offers employees empowerment, career progression and financial rewards. As a company that is forecast for continuous growth in the UK and further expansion overseas, the career opportunities at Busy Bees are numerous.

## HANDS-ON TRAINING

Busy Bees Training (part of the Busy Bees childcare group) has delivered its apprenticeship programme to over 1,600 learners so far, within both Busy Bees nurseries and smaller, independent nursery settings. To date the programme has recruited over 500 school leavers and upskilled a further 1,100 Busy Bees employees. By the end of 2016 it is anticipated there will be around 1,500 learners on an apprenticeship delivered by Busy Bees Training Academy.



*Training Manager Fay Gibbin currently oversees 1,000 learners who are undertaking a*

*childcare, management or nursery catering apprenticeship as well as over 25 short courses delivered on a quarterly basis over seven locations.*



# Play Therapy

*Train in a new way to help young children and their parents...*

**G**overnment-sponsored surveys show that 10% of UK children have a mental health problem and others indicate that another 10% have psychological issues. Nursery settings are wonderfully positioned to

respond because young children's brains have a high degree of plasticity, allowing their minds to change – especially when they benefit from the therapeutic use of play and the creative arts.

Consider the children you take care of. How many...

- ❖ Find it difficult to concentrate or learn?
- ❖ Can't control their anger?
- ❖ Have suffered trauma?
- ❖ Have autistic tendencies?
- ❖ Are suffering because of separated/divorced parents?
- ❖ Are suffering from anxiety, stress or phobias?
- ❖ Are suffering from a loss or bereavement?
- ❖ Are adopted or fostered?
- ❖ Are withdrawn or continually unhappy?
- ❖ Bully others or are bullied themselves?
- ❖ Find it difficult to make friends?
- ❖ Quarrel frequently with peers or siblings?
- ❖ Have nightmares or disturbed sleep?
- ❖ Display inappropriate behaviour?

However many it might be, you will no doubt have found that children either do not want to talk about these problems, or more frequently, *cannot* because the underlying cause is lodged in their unconscious. When Jimmy is asked 'Why did you kick Joanne?' and he answers 'I don't know', he's probably right

The latest research shows that Play Therapy heals these conditions and allows children to learn more effectively: 80% of girls and 75% of boys were found to have exhibited a positive change, findings based on 28,000 pre- and post-therapy measures from referrers and parents gathered over the last 10 years. A similar scale of change is also observed by parents in the home environment, with 77% of children showing a positive change in the UK.

**The Register of Play and Creative Arts Therapists is managed by Play Therapy UK and accredited by the (PSA). For more information, visit [playtherapyregister.org.uk](http://playtherapyregister.org.uk) and [playtherapy.org.uk](http://playtherapy.org.uk)**



**Add further credibility to your nursery! More help for the children, support for parents.**

**Train one of your staff as a Registered Practitioner in Therapeutic Play Skills or as a Certified Play Therapist.**

- ✓ Alleviate children's emotional, behaviour problems and learning difficulties
- ✓ Increase children's happiness and emotional well-being
- ✓ Address attachment problems
- ✓ Help parents who want to improve their relationship with their children

The APAC courses are the only ones that provide entry to the 'Register of Play and Creative Arts Therapists' accredited by the Professional Standards Authority and managed by PTUK. This assures the quality of your therapist's work and adds to the status of your nursery.



- ✓ Increase services offered at a reasonable cost
- ✓ Improve the job satisfaction of your staff
- ✓ Strengthen your nursery's holistic approach
- ✓ Differentiate your services from the competition
- ✓ Reinforce your drive for high quality care
- ✓ Gain points in inspection visits

**Nursery school staff, with two or more years experience, are ideally suited to train as Play Therapy professionals.**

**Find out more: Ask for our 28 page training and career guide.**

**Attend a one-day Introduction to Play Therapy course.**

12 convenient training venues: London Central (Waterloo), Tunbridge Wells, Birmingham, Bristol, Truro, Barnsley, Manchester, Huntingdon, Windsor, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Antrim,.

Email: [mokijep@aol.com](mailto:mokijep@aol.com)  
 Web: [www.playtherapy.org.uk](http://www.playtherapy.org.uk) & [www.playtherapyregister.org.uk](http://www.playtherapyregister.org.uk)  
 Phone: 01825 761143

Play Therapy UK  
 The Coach House  
 Belmont Road  
 Uckfield, East Sussex  
 TN22 1BU



# How safe is your setting?

*Protecting children from harm is every nursery's most vital duty, so you need to get health and safety right. **Laura West** offers her advice on ensuring your team's practice is up to scratch...*

**T**here are many areas to think about when focusing on health and safety in your setting. These include a range of potential hazards inside and out that must be kept in mind. While not an exhaustive list, the following highlights some of the most commonly encountered issues...

## HAZARDS INDOORS

**Food** – specifically cross contamination and allergies. Most nurseries have good procedures for the preparation of food and feeding children at mealtimes, but cross contamination is a big risk that people often forget. It can

be overcome by making sure all children are cleaned after mealtimes, removing clothing that is particle covered, and prompt housekeeping, including wiping tables, chairs, placements and in particular floors.

**Fire** – blocked fire exits and escape routes are a hazard we come across a lot, with the culprits often pushchairs, beds or large toys/activities. Make sure all your fire exits and routes are clearly marked, and that staff and parents are aware of them. Fire-fighting equipment should always be readily available – sometimes we see extinguishers used as coat pegs or door wedges, or hidden behind furniture! Staff training and education is the only way to overcome this.

**Trapped fingers** – most nurseries use finger guards but if they are not in a good state of repair, they might as well not be used. Have a daily inspection of guards: simply run your hands up and down to make sure they are safe and fit for purpose.

**Electrical wires/cords** – having a computer or light table in your nursery offers massive educational benefits, but it also carries its own risk in the form of possible strangulation from wires. Make sure where possible that all wires are out of reach and out of sight of

children. If they can be attached to the wall safely or in wire tidies, this should control the risk. Make sure temporary pieces of equipment are placed out of reach after use.

**Blind cords** – one of the biggest strangulation risks we see. Cords should be of the safety variety, which will snap open when pressure is applied, and must be out of reach of the children. Where possible, use a cleat used to secure the cords.

**Medicines** – generally speaking nurseries are good at making sure children with long-term medical conditions have medication on site. However, this medication needs to have its expiry dates logged and managed. We regularly see inhalers, auto-injectors and bottled medicines that are past their expiration date, and therefore not effective should they be required.

## HAZARDS OUTDOORS

**Sandpits** – they're great fun and children love to play in them, but beware, so does your local wildlife, e.g. foxes and cats, who may use them as a giant litter box. A well-fitted cover that goes on when the sandpit is not in use by the children will reduce this risk.

## CHECK YOUR PRACTICE

### NURSERIES NEED TO GUARD AGAINST THESE SIX KEY HEALTH & SAFETY FAILINGS...

- 1 **Lack of understanding of the law.**
- 2 **Poor understanding of what hazards are and what risk is.**
- 3 **Not realising how actions can affect others.**
- 4 **Cutting corners because of time restraints.**
- 5 **Laziness (does everyone change PPE and clean down the nappy-change area after every child?)**
- 6 **Thinking health & safety involves too much paperwork.**





## Display ribbons/strings

– they may previously have supported beautiful displays, but over time they fall off and become a slack strangulation risk. Always check the garden and remove any potential hazards. Even if you're planning to replace the display next week, take the ribbons/string down until they're needed.

**Fences & gates** – most nurseries have very good security at the front door with key codes, intercoms and CCTV; however, this is worthless if you can simply walk round to the garden and let yourself in through the gate, or in some cases, simply lean over low-level fences and pick up a child. Try this yourself: if you can reach your hand over and open a gate, so can a stranger. Fences and gates may need to be higher or additional locks added lower down.

## Garden play equipment

– because it's outside, it isn't checked as regularly as that found indoors. Plastic toys will get weathered over time and become brittle, and may develop sharp edges. All equipment should be checked before use as part of your daily routine.

**Gardens** – growing fruit and vegetables is a great way to help children understand where food comes from. However, both children and staff

allergies need to be taken into account. Strawberries shouldn't be grown in a nursery, and we have in the past also found children with allergies to tomatoes and even mint leaves. Again, full knowledge of all your children's allergies is required – don't plant anything you're unsure of.

## RISK ASSESSMENTS

There are five basic steps to writing an effective risk assessment. You must identify the hazard; decide who might be harmed and how; evaluate the risk and decide on precautions; record your findings and implement them; then review your risk assessment and update if necessary.

While bearing these steps in mind, there are also simple things you can do to improve the effectiveness of your assessment and ensure it's fit for purpose.

When writing a risk assessment, involve the people who will carry out the task or activity; they will have more knowledge of what's involved, and two minds are always better than one.

Write your risk assessment clearly and in plain language; avoiding using jargon will help everyone to understand.

Make sure your staff have read and understand the risk assessment and any actions they must take to control the

risk. If staff don't understand fully what it is they are meant to do, risk assessments can cause more harm than good.

If a hazard is a substance or piece of equipment, the best thing to do is to eliminate the hazard altogether. Where this can't be done, choose a less harmful/dangerous version.

Risk controls that require people to do something are always the least reliable and should always be used if there is no other option – e.g. you may provide PPE, but do your staff use it?

Remember, if you have five or more employees, your healthy and safety policy must be written down to comply with the law.

Risk assessments are not about writing pages but about highlighting hazards and clearly stating risk controls you have or need to put in place.

**MCW is a family-run business specialising in the streamlining of health and safety and auditing processes in the childcare industry. Visit [mcwconsulting.co.uk](http://mcwconsulting.co.uk) for information on its services and training, including IOSH Managing Safety, First Aid and Fire courses and other training.**

## DID YOU KNOW?

IF YOU SIGN OFF A CHECKLIST WITHOUT ACTUALLY CARRYING OUT THE PHYSICAL CHECKS, IT'S NOT WORTH THE PAPER IT IS WRITTEN ON. THE PERSON WHO HAS SIGNED THE DOCUMENT WILL STILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE IN THE EYES OF THE LAW.



Laura West is MCW's childcare health and safety specialist.

Email [laura@mcwconsulting.co.uk](mailto:laura@mcwconsulting.co.uk)





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# 5 DISASTERS YOU WEREN'T EXPECTING

*Morton Michel's **Jerry Beere** explains why good insurance is more vital to your business than you might realise...*

A typical insurance policy will provide cover for all the misfortunes you might expect could befall your business (floods, fires, thefts, etc.), but what about the unexpected things? Here are five situations you may not even have realised you need – and can get – insurance cover for.

# 1

## PUBLIC CHILDCARE PROCEEDINGS

These are a little known aspect of the UK's childcare protection system, but they can be very expensive. If a child suffers unexplained injuries, social services can convene a Public Childcare hearing at which every adult who has had responsibility for the care of the child – parents, grandparents, nursery staff – could be called to answer questions. Those called should have legal representation since everyone else there will have it. Barristers don't come cheap. Will your insurance policy cover you for the cost of legal representation? A good one will.

# 2

## Hidden perils of sports day

One of our larger liability claims in recent years concerned a parent who, while attending sports day at her daughter's nursery on public property, stood in a disused sprinkler hole, fell over and severely tore the tendons and muscles in her ankle. She was off work for many months and the liability claim ran into many thousands of pounds. Your insurance policy should cover activities away from the normal premises. Insurance companies will place restrictions on the type of activities – they are unlikely to cover abseiling or sea kayaking, for example – but sports days in the local park should be automatically covered. Note, however, that you always have a duty of care to your visitors, wherever the activity takes place. You must properly risk assess these activities beforehand; if you haven't, the insurance company could void your policy in the event of a claim.

## Reputational damage

A child manages to get out of your nursery and is found wandering down the high street. This is a nightmare – you have failed in your basic duty to protect him or her. Before you have had a chance to contact the parents, the story is all over social media; soon the local press are round, then local TV. All of them are shouting questions at you, asking how this could possibly happen. Later, Twitter users proclaim your nursery the worst in existence...

You don't know how to handle this. What you need is the services of a PR expert. Some nursery policies will now provide Reputational Risk cover as standard under their policies. The PR expert comes out, deals with the local press and TV, arranges to write to all your parents and generally handles the unwelcome publicity of this unfortunate event.

# 4

## The Inland Revenue

Ever had a visit from the Inland Revenue? Not pleasant. They can, if they want to, go trawling back through your accounts for years. You would be best advised to have your own accountants there to help you deal with them. But they don't come cheap and they charge by the hour. Fortunately, a decent insurance policy will have Tax Protection cover for full and aspect enquiries, and will pay accountant's fees while you are trying to sort out the mess.

## REPLACEMENT WAGES

Imagine you are inspected by Ofsted following allegations of child abuse. You have to suspend a member of staff on full pay pending the outcome of investigations, but, obviously you will need to hire temporary staff for the duration of the suspension. If you have the right insurance policy, you will have cover for replacement wages in this situation, ensuring you are not left out of pocket.

# 5



**Morton Michel**  
The Childcare Insurance Specialist

JERRY BEERE IS DIRECTOR OF CHILDCARE INSURANCE SPECIALIST MORTON MICHEL. VISIT [MORTONMICHEL.COM](http://MORTONMICHEL.COM)

# Focus on First Aid

*The British Red Cross answers questions about its paediatric first aid training course...*

## Q WHO IS THE BRITISH RED CROSS' PAEDIATRIC FIRST AID TRAINING COURSE FOR?

A The course is suitable for people over the age of 16 who care for children in any professional setting. It's ideal for au pairs, nannies, childminders, nursery and preschool workers, sport and leisure staff, crèche leaders and anyone responsible for the welfare of children. The course also includes basic adult first aid skills.

## Q WHAT TOPICS DOES THE RED CROSS COURSE COVER?

A The course covers how to help babies and children from birth to puberty who:

- ✦ are unresponsive and breathing, or unresponsive and not breathing
- ✦ are choking or bleeding
- ✦ are burnt or scalded
- ✦ have an object in their eye, ear or nose
- ✦ have hypothermia or heat exhaustion
- ✦ have sickness or a fever.
- ✦ have an injury to a bone, muscle or joint (including spinal injuries)
- ✦ have a head injury
- ✦ have swallowed something harmful.

It also covers medical emergencies, including:

- ✦ meningitis
- ✦ diabetic emergency
- ✦ seizures
- ✦ asthma attack
- ✦ severe allergic reaction (anaphylactic shock)
- ✦ sickling crisis

## Q HOW IS THE INFORMATION IN THE COURSE IMPARTED TO TRAINEES?

A Our course is delivered through a combination of interactive delivery methods designed to increase confidence when faced with a first aid emergency. Trainers use a range of techniques, including trainer demonstrations, videos and practical scenarios. Each course will differ slightly to meet the learning styles within the group, with each learner



receiving a training pack that includes a host of resources to help them practise the skills covered.

## Q AND HOW IS THE COURSE ASSESSED?

A All learners attending the paediatric first training course must be able to demonstrate a level of understanding and competency, including being physically able to perform the skills required, to pass the course and receive a certificate. Learners are continually assessed throughout the two days using a range of methods to make sure they are competent in all the life-saving skills covered on the course.

## Q HOW LONG DOES THE COURSE TAKE TO COMPLETE, AND HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

A The course takes two days to complete – these can be two consecutive days, or one day per week over two consecutive weeks. On successful completion, learners receive a

paediatric first aid certificate, which is valid for three years. In line with the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, this course can be used as evidence for an NVQ in childcare and education. The course is priced at £105 (£120 inside the M25) ex. VAT. To find out more visit [redcrossfirstaidtraining.co.uk](http://redcrossfirstaidtraining.co.uk)

## Q HOW CAN THOSE WHO HAVE QUALIFIED KEEP THEIR SKILLS UP TO DATE?

A We are the only training provider with a free, unique, online customer support programme to help keep skills up to date. Safe Hands is available to anyone who attends one of our workplace courses, and members can access monthly first aid updates, tips, case studies and video clips of key techniques in various workplace settings for various accidents and illnesses. Our free Baby and Child First Aid app is available to download and is packed with useful videos, animations and tips. Visit [redcross.org.uk/babyandchildapp](http://redcross.org.uk/babyandchildapp)



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Jonny Keen is a  
nursery practitioner.

**S**o you've opened an early years setting and have realised belatedly that you're lacking in people management skills. You know there are pitfalls ahead, but that blindfold of inexperience is making them nigh on impossible to spot. If you're not careful, your clumsy attempts at leadership will have your staff team mutinying before the year is out, with parents following close behind. At that point there won't be a cosy corner calming enough to restore you once the shouting has died down.

But there's still time to avert catastrophe. Below you'll find five habits of terrible leaders. All you need do is avoid them (unless, of course, you're a spy from the powerful stay-at-home parent lobby out to sabotage the UK childcare industry – in which case, do your worst!)

### **“KEEP YOURSELF TO YOURSELF”**

Practitioners like to feel that all staff members – from the manager right down to the cleaner – are in the same boat, united in the goal of trying to run the best setting possible. And so it's bound to annoy the grunt-level practitioners when leaders confine themselves to an office, issuing orders from their proverbial ivory tower. Good luck implementing new policies and practices when you can't keep an eye on your staff, too!

### **“MAKE UNREASONABLE DEMANDS”**

Early years practitioners are human beings with troubles of their own, and so they don't appreciate having unreasonable demands made of them whilst working. Ordering a big increase in paperwork or a drastic change of policy without assessing what's realistic is bound to cause resentment, a drop in morale and less efficient work...

## **How NOT to lead a nursery**

*If you can avoid making your staff feel insignificant, impoverished and generally worn out and defeated, it's best to do that, says Jonny Keen...*

### **“PLAY THE BIG BOSS”**

If you really want to get your staff's backs up, be sure to emphasise how much more important than them you are. So they do the ground work that allows the setting to run from day to day? Brush that under the carpet. Make sure you tell them that you're the one who does the real work around here. You've got the degree in education and the money to finance the setting. Your staff are only the ones who change the nappies...

### **“KEEP STAFF BACK AFTER HOURS”**

Staff understand that after-work meetings are sometimes necessary, but there's a limit to what's acceptable. Organise your catch-ups once a month, or even once a fortnight to really rile them! If a staff member comes to you and explains that finding childcare is difficult, shake your head and sigh – perhaps even throw in a passive aggressive comment about “not being part of the team”. If you really want to go nuclear, send staff on regular weekend-long training courses...

### **“MAKE PAY A TABOO”**

As much as your practitioners may be passionate about childcare, there's another reason they put in 40 hard hours per week; they need their wages! They've got bills that need paying, after all.

Not sympathetic towards the more ‘financially impaired’? Make sure to roll up to the after-hours staff meeting in an expensive car and immediately veto your minimum wage employees' request for a pay rise. Don't just refuse the request, refuse to even discuss it. Staff can understand that a struggling company might find it difficult to up wages, but they won't like having no prospect of even discussing a pay rise however hard they work. If you receive emails querying salaries, simply ignore them! Make the whole subject a taboo, never to be discussed. The staff need to know: minimum wage is for life.





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