



## **Chairs Report AGM July 2021 (Virtual Meeting)**

Firstly, I would like to thank the Management, Staff and Committee members, for what has been a very challenging year (18 months). There has been so much guidance to wade through and lots of changes to undertake. We have had to make decisions quickly and effectively. Overall, we have aimed to maintain a consistent and outstanding provision, for preschool children and families, whilst supporting our loyal and committed staff and yet remain sustainable for future generations of our community.

### **Covid 19**

Obviously, this has been another extremely challenging year! We lost 80% of our income which came from wrap around fees. Early Years staff continued to be furloughed from September and then Ruth Vaughan (Setting Manager) and Linda Kitching (Administrator and acting Deputy) were also furloughed from November.

We re-opened in September, for all children, but with lower numbers than usual, just 36 on roll. This was a very difficult decision in part as we do NOT socially distance from the children and therefore staff and both their own families and the families of the children attending were put at risk. Without vaccines or any asymptomatic testing until February 2021 when Early Years settings became eligible.

We were also unable to show any families around the setting or settle children under the guidance until September 2020 so Ruth made a virtual tour and we have tried as best as possible to engage with new families, through increased social media as well as sending home lots of insights into the day and sharing frequently the children's memory books.

For a month through November, we had a national lockdown with restrictions being lifted for Christmas. During this lockdown we stayed open for all children but split into two groups, so children attended either Mon-Wed or Thursday and Friday.

On January 6<sup>th</sup> the UK 2021 went into its third Lockdown and yet Early Years settings were instructed by the government to stay open to all children if they were able. We decided at this point to keep the Hive open Tues-Fri and the room Mon-Fri with children in Cohorts of school starting age.

At different times over the academic year, we have had parents keep their children at home, through their choice. We have had to ask families to change sessions, and children to change groups. There have been so many new challenges to contend with, but we have done it, and now look forward to the future with new opportunities, with our aim to be the best Early Years setting we can be! This has definitely been a year of reflection and transition and we are all feeling positive about moving forward.

## **Preschool Finances**

- We don't currently have a waiting list, all children offered places for September 2021
- We had 36 children on Preschool roll until July 2021
- We have not run any wrap care this year Sept 2020-July 2021

Luckily our accounts showed a healthy bank balance at the beginning of the year, allowing us cushioning for sustainability. Whilst preschool is a non-profit-making charity, we need to keep a few months running costs in accordance with the charity commissions guidelines to ensure sustainability in the face of unforeseen difficulties. See separate Reserve Policy which was this year set at Approximately £86,000.

## **Wrap Care**

COVID 19 forced us to close "Breakfast and After School Clubs" (Wrap care) from March 2020. We were then unable to re-start it following government guidance and through discussions with Amy Pearce, throughout this academic year 2020/21. In part this was because of the bubble system, in the school but also in the Preschool, with reduced staffing which we had previously needed to run wrap care, (reduced by 5), with now only 4 trained Early Years Practitioners; a manager; an Administrator (and acting deputy); and an apprentice.

At the beginning of March 2021, we informed North Hinksey School Governors that we were no longer in a position to run the wrap care for them. There had been increasing pressure from school parents wanting this provision to re-start and we felt it was not something we could provide at this time. In part this was because of reduced staffing; no testing; no vaccinations; the inability to charge fees if closed or if a child was self-isolating; staff only receiving 5 days sick pay; staff only being entitled to SSP if self-isolating. Unlike schools who still receive funding and staff pay and benefits, if a bubble or setting constantly closed or if the setting closed, we would not continue to be sustainable.

It was not a decision taken lightly and through working with the working party we have been supporting the school/ parents in understanding the challenges "Wrap-care" posed for us as well as identifying the change as an opportunity for school/ parents and children as well as for Preschool going forward. In June 2021 School confirmed they have signed a contract with a new breakfast and after school club provider.

Preschool are now considering providing some extended hours for Preschool children to run alongside this school provision, which is suitable for our children and sustainable and manageable for current staffing levels.

## **Building Lease**

We continued to have a good working relationship with North Hinksey School. We meet virtually with the Head teacher, Amy Pearce to discuss premises issues, joint sessions, wrap care and shared policies. Following

the working party, the School have asked the Oxford Diocese Schools Trust to look into refreshing our lease and we are awaiting more information on what this would entail.

### **30 Hours Free Nursery Education Funding**

We continue to offer the 15 hours free NEF to all families and remain opted out of the extended offer of 30 free hours for working families only. We continue to allow parents to buy additional hours above the 15, as many of our current families already do. We feel this way we can accommodate more families who require our services, remain sustainable and maintain a high-quality provision. We are however starting to see families move their child to local settings providing the 30 hours NEF. This could be something we look at again in the near future, now we are no longer making surplus money from wrap care fees.

The NEF funding this year was set at £4.18 per hour for a funded 3-year-old and £5.68 for a funded 2-year-old, an increase of just 15p and 16p respectively. Funding is still inadequate across all Early Years settings as has been recorded at length in the media throughout the Pandemic. We have run at a loss month on Month throughout this year and will continue to do so over the coming months. We have had to rely on furlough payments to cover some of the shortfall from less fees, and reduced funding (less children)

### **Fees**

From September 2021 we will be increasing the paid fees to £6.50 per hour for a paying 3-year-old and £6.80 for a paying 2-year-old. We are also increasing the maintenance fee to £30 a full term, to cover the increased cost of cleaning, cleaning products, administration, snacks and consumables.

### **Staffing**

This year I would like to thank staff for their continued support and motivation. They have demonstrated resilience, tenacity, loyalty and commitment to both our setting but mostly to the children and families in our care.

Sadly, we had to make the role of housekeeper redundant and therefore said goodbye to Jean Watson who had worked in the Wrap care originally and formerly as preschool housekeeper. Due to low numbers of preschool children and no breakfast or after school club this role was no longer viable.

We said good bye to Kat Hlavinkova, in September having completed her apprenticeship and securing a job at the Churchill, Julia Durbin nursery.

We also will say good bye to Lucia Boue at the end of summer term. She will have completed her level 3 apprenticeship with us and is about to take up a post as a trained level 3 Early Years Lead Practitioner at Grandpont Nursery. We wish her every success for the future.

All staff were offered voluntary redundancy on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021 as we needed to re-issue contracts, no longer being able to offer the extended hours (due to longer providing wrap care for school age children) As some staff worked excess of 35 hours (which all we are able to now offer) we were advised by Law call that this was the process to undertake. No staff took us up on this offer. New contracts were issued.

All staff have been flexibly furloughed since November 2020. This however will cease on July 31<sup>st</sup> 2021, as the cost to us will be too great. Furlough enabled us to pay staff for the hours they were not working due to no wrap care and reduced numbers of children.

Staff have not received a pay review this year. The last pay review was February 2020 when staff were awarded a 2% increase.

### **Fundraising**

Fundraising has been suspended due to Covid 19. Ruth applied for and received, a Grant from Oxfordshire County Council for £7,000 in September which enabled us to create our own separate pathway, from school and also to build a covered space to extend the outdoor space for the Hive, over the Christmas Holidays. Ruth also applied for a grant to buy some resources for outside, however were not successful.

### **Training and qualifications**

Throughout this year Staff have undertaken training, during their Furloughed hours. We have completed training on the revised EYFS (Sept 2021), Assessment, Child Development, Oral Health, WellComm, SEND, as well as Designated Safeguarding and numerous other short courses which have been of particular interest to practitioners' roles.

### **Future Plans**

As I have already said this has been a year to reflect on what we would like to be, and how can we achieve that. The revised EYFS (2021) has been an opportunity for us to consider our offer and really focus on things we would like to do better. Over the last few years running the wrap care had impacted a great deal on what we were able to provide the pre-schoolers. We are currently evaluating extended hours provision and will consider offering 30 hours again, although we will need it to not be detrimental to our sustainability.

### **Committee**

Our committee remains in place as Stuart Dashwood -Chair, Ian Fitchett- treasurer and Linda Kitching - Secretary.