

## **Busy Bees Stays Open in More Than 100 Locations to Support Key Workers and Vulnerable Children**

The global Covid-19 pandemic has brought huge changes and challenges to everyone across the world. Life has changed for everyone in the sector and will continue to challenge us in making sense of what has happened and how we respond for the foreseeable future.

The weekly public applause for NHS and key workers is a small token of appreciation by every community for their efforts but it is rarely acknowledged by the media the part our dedicated nursery teams have to play in providing care education and a little normality for children whilst their parents carry out their vitally important roles.

There has been much comment about a lack of places at nurseries for the children of key workers and criticism where providers have taken the difficult decision to close. It is easy to understand the frustration felt by those who need childcare and cannot access it, but also for many providers in the sector difficult decisions have had to be taken. Knowing the reasons why most people choose a career in Early years and love they have for the sector I appreciate that these decisions have not been made without great thought and consideration.

At Busy Bees we wanted to play our part and as much as we were able, do the right thing for our key worker parents and our communities. We wanted to be as flexible as we could be and to be where we were most needed, and it is this thinking that has shaped our decisions and actions. We are doing our very best to support as many key worker families as possible as well as 194 vulnerable children currently in our care, we expect more than 100 of our centres nationwide will remain open throughout the crisis, even though many are not financially viable with just the children of key workers.

Carefully assessing the needs of each community where we operate, we have merged nurseries and closed some ensuring there is adequate provision in place in each community. We will continue to do this for as long as we can and endeavour to be flexible, opening where there is sufficient demand, balanced against sensible decisions to ensure our future sustainability.

The recent government announcement regarding the withdrawal of important financial support that the sector is relying on, will without doubt have a devastating impact on childcare settings, both big and small. Preserving jobs was at the very heart of the job retention scheme, but sadly, for some, this will now not be the case. It's an incredibly challenging time for us all and we must try to persuade Government to revisit their criteria to protect jobs and the sector as a whole, enabling us to continue providing care to our key workers and vulnerable children and to support the future sustainability of the sector.

As a nation we have all watched with pride and admiration how our already stretched NHS staff have responded to a situation that is hugely difficult and presents a real risk to them and their families. Other workers have also gone above and beyond what is usually expected of them, delivery drivers, food retail staff and never forgetting our own loyal staff teams, but these are odd times where the unusual is now the new normal.

We are so fortunate to work in a sector where the people are amazing, recognising the efforts of those in the frontline they are determined to do what they can to support. I have watched with admiration our staff who have been incredibly positive and embraced new ways of working which

### **Head Office**

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has given us flexibility to maintain provision for the children of key workers. This is not unusual, it comes with the role, it's what those in the profession do.

Over the past 36 years we have all been confronted with numerous challenges that have made us change the way we think. Recessions, changes in legislation, funding, but none that will impact in the same way as this. As a sector we will not come out of this unscathed, but we are resilient we have risen to challenges in the past and we won't let this beat us. Delivering high quality care and education that will impact on children's lives is what we do, so for now we make preparations for our return critical and we are committed to supporting families remotely because this is the only childhood they have.

Whilst it is the case that many nurseries took the decision to close because of Coronavirus we felt there is a bigger picture and a longer game to be played. We want to be part of a solution to this situation by keeping our doors open and not creating a further problem to under pressure key worker parents and government by shutting up shop and the only approach we can take is a positive approach. Our commitment to those key workers putting themselves at risk is to support them in the battle against this dreadful virus by continuing to provide high quality childcare and give their children the best start in life – whatever the circumstances.

Marg Randles OBE

**Founder and Chief Academic Officer**

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