

## **City Childcare Childminder Agency: The Nursery Model**

### **Background**

Husband-and-wife team John and Louise Felstead have been directors of Mallards Wood Daycare and Preschool in Woodford Green, Essex, for 14 years. When Mr Felstead came across details about childminder agencies online, it was instantly obvious that the model would perfectly complement the couple's existing business.

"When we show people around the nursery, they often ask for the option of using a childminder and nursery, or perhaps just a childminder if the baby is young," says Mrs Felstead. "While we do have links with local childminders, we couldn't previously offer that regulated service ourselves."

The two directors have set up City Childcare Childminder Agency (CCCA), which will launch officially at the end of March 2016. "We are able to offer people a mixture of services, perhaps three days with the childminder and two days at nursery," says Mrs Felstead. "This offers parents the best of both options."

### **Integration**

The synergy between the nursery and agency allows the two businesses to support each other. The childminder agency will offer before- and after-school care to older children, including nursery children moving on to reception. Meanwhile the nursery, or other agency childminders, will be able to provide parents with holiday or emergency cover.

The government's planned expansion of free childcare for three and four-year-olds from 15 to 30 hours was also a key factor behind the agency launch. "When we first talked about setting up an agency, one of the things to strike us immediately was how this will work for the 30 hours," says Mrs Felstead. "We will be able to use the whole concept of wraparound care. Some childminders can't do the whole 30 hours, so this could be divided between the childminder and nursery."

### **Delivery**

The couple have worked with five consultant childminders in setting up CCCA, to ensure the agency will be able to manage the varied needs of different practitioners. The team is currently refining its support packages and pricing system, but its childminders will clearly benefit from the nursery's infrastructure and resources, including the expertise of its staff.

"We will be different from some of the other agencies – our unique selling point is the fact we have the nursery backing," says Ms Felstead. "Childminders are able to attend the nursery with their children because we have a childminder drop-in zone. We will offer training as and when required, provide support online, over the telephone and face-to-face, and when new guidelines or legislation comes out our team of experts will quickly get it out to our childminders using our IT systems."

City Childcare will also benefit from the use of online administration systems already developed for the nursery. "There is an enormous amount of administration around the whole early years environment, but we are able to streamline that – most policies such as safeguarding and welfare apply to nurseries as well as childminders," says Mrs Felstead, who is an Early Years teacher and also has a business degree and a background in IT. "The Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) checking process for example is the same for childminders and nursery staff."

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment of both childminders and parents will be supported by the team's existing businesses. In addition to the nursery, the Felsteads own Brainbox tuition centre, part of Mallards Wood Education, in Woodford Green, which offers professional tuition in maths, English and science to primary and secondary school students.

"Every parent of children using the tuition centre will be told about the childminder agency," says Mrs Felstead. "We also have parents and childminders who pick children up from nursery that have expressed interest, and we will approach past parents." The agency will target childminders and parents online, via social media, and through word of mouth, advertise in local magazines and newspapers, and take stands at local community events.

### **Sustainability**

City Childcare aims to cover the whole of East London, including parts of Essex. The team is in talks with six local authorities to see how they can work together. The Felsteads are confident that their business is sustainable.

"We have carried out careful due diligence and we are confident that we have a business model that will break even in our targeted timeframe," says Mrs Felstead. "Local authorities only cover one area, but we would cover the whole of East London, supporting childminders even if they move between boroughs."

Ms Felstead, who also trained as an Ofsted inspector, sees the delivery of high quality childcare places as the core factor in all her businesses, with quality assessment at the heart of everything they do. "We are trying to build up an assortment of high-quality, flexible childcare offerings," she concludes.