



## Surviving COVID-19 – A 13-week Rollercoaster ride

Even before lock down was official, our first endeavor was to be as honest and upfront with our parents, even though we knew it was a fast moving and ever-changing situation. We listened to their concerns, we sent regular email updates and used our social media platforms to the maximum. Parent confidence was the key, we were all paddling like mad under the water but with a brave smile on our faces.

And then as lockdown was announced we were determined to remain open to support our families, our children and our teams.

From the start it was apparent that we would need to begin planning for the 'new normal', it wasn't so much about what we couldn't do any longer but how we would continue to provide the warm caring environment which we had always prided ourselves upon.

To control costs and reduce the number of team required we took the decision to bring Dolphin and Sunshine under one roof, we had a minimal amount of children but we couldn't let our parents down.



We began by bringing the teams together, the Avengers as they became known, to gather their ideas and plan our way forward.

Everyone pulled together; the team are the experts at ensuring the space was utilized, activities were considered and everyone knew who was responsible for the care of the children, carrying out more regular cleaning, and being clear on our policy and risk assessment.



Even with a tight control on costs, we were losing money but we used the time carefully, practices were updated, planning, development processes reviewed and updated. Walls were painted, maintenance jobs completed, new toilets installed. At one point if it didn't move it was painted!



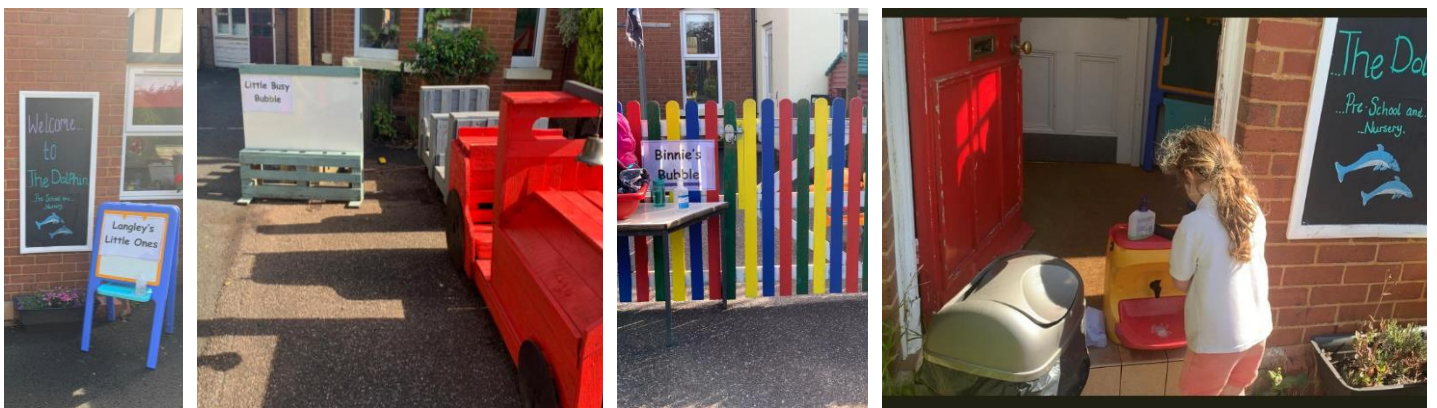
We set up a Private Parent Group on Facebook for those families that were self-isolating or found themselves furloughed, as well as for those families that were critical keyworkers and having to be at the frontline knowing that we were caring for their child. We used it for our updates too, how the setting was running to help parents, what improvements we'd made and how we were taking on Coronavirus. This became a huge success, whether it be parents and children being able to keep in touch with one another, posting photos, videos and ideas or just supporting one another.

The team whilst on furlough have used the time to refresh their knowledge with online training and the odd video messages or reading stories.



By this stage we were already offering a 'bubble' (as they are now known) within our inside and outdoor spaces. And like other settings our research showed the risk was lower outside, the weather was a massive help of course. As well as trying out new and fun activities we were able to turn their outside space into their own 'café quarters' for snack and lunchtimes.

When 'bubbles' became an actual thing, our experience from remaining open during the crisis enabled us to have confidence in what we were doing and enable us to explain to parents so they understood our new routine, parent agreements were signed and returned before their child started back with us.



We were able to ensure that although impossible to 'social distance' with younger children we wanted to minimise the risk of infection. We had already implemented frequent handwashing (our children are now proficient in counting to 20 and singing various rhymes and songs: tick that off the EYFS Development

Matters!) and our cleaning rotas. Siblings are kept together in their 'bubbles' and the children within those 'bubbles' had their own entrance with hand sanitizing station, staggered drop off and pick up times and their teams stayed constant, this kept everything as 'normal' as possible.

The feedback we've received from our families and their continued support has been overwhelming. The smiles on their child's faces as they are handed over at the end of the day is testament that we are getting it right. Every day we have more and more children wanting to come back and although currently we are prioritising those returning we are able to offer new 'bubbles'.



June 1<sup>st</sup> saw Sunshine return to their Sunny Place at Gorfin Hall and start a new bubble.



As we move towards July we are adapting again, 3 bubbles will become 5 as we welcome back 75-80% of our families, parents have confidence in what we are doing which is helping them get back to some form of normal.

Looking back, reflecting as all Early Years settings are so good at, it been a proper roller coaster but overall would we change anything we did??? No, we are extremely proud of our amazing team and the role they played during the COVID-19 lockdown and we feel the world has changed, some of these changes are certainly for the better.

Teams and Zoom are now everyday words within both settings, from linking outside agencies to keep in touch with our most vulnerable children and families, or regular debriefs with supervisors and teams with the odd virtual quiz night thrown in. This wouldn't have happened without lockdown, environmentally this as to be a good thing.

Our Dolphin Room Supervisors and Sunshine Manager Andrea have worked everyday throughout the crisis, the furlough team have been amazing with support and coming back to work as there was a requirement. Parents have shown amazing patience, often when we didn't quite have the answers ourselves and FINALLY, the children. They have all been absolute stars throughout and we would go as far as to say they actually helped us survive it, parents thanked us for keeping it normal for the children, it was actually the other way around.