



Carbon Footprints Case Study

Introduction

The Carbon Footprints nursery is situated in the north west corner of the CHANGE project area, as part of the Calton political ward. The service was opened in November 2012 under the guidance of Milnbank Community Enterprise Committee, a subsidiary of Milnbank Housing Association (MHA).

The service has distinct features that are of interest to the CHANGE project. It is the only service currently offering nursery and out of school care provision from the same premises and has a unique fee structure with the inclusion of a small number of subsidised places. This report was compiled based on discussions with R.E.M. Ltd. R.E.M. has experience working in a number of project areas, including childcare. They provided project management and support from inception to delivery for this project. This was supplemented by the content of a report submitted to the Big Lottery Fund in 2016 and extracts from the business plan and start-up strategy from 2012. CHANGE staff visited the site in October 2017 and met with the service manager.

1. Identifying the local childcare need

Milnbank Community Enterprise Committee provided the steering group for the project. The committee, which was made up of people living in the area currently served by the nursery, decided from an early stage that a childcare facility would be the preferred option for the project. Their rationale for this was centred on creating childcare provision that would be affordable to local families, while also providing a flexible service that would support families with a range of personal circumstances. The committee identified a shortfall in childcare provision within the area, while also encountering systems for the delivery of childcare that were too rigid to meet the needs of families. The committee drew on previous childcare audits for the area and this was supported by further market research including contacting local providers directly to establish levels of availability within their service.

2. Development costs

Capital funding of £587,950 was provided by the Big Lottery Fund over two years with a further £199,000 coming from the Climate Challenge Fund. This ensured that the service was designed with an environmentally friendly and energy efficient model at the core. Other grants that were obtained during the design and implementation phases of the project included revenue provision of £290,000 from the Big Lottery Fund over 3 years and some smaller grants from other sources including Glasgow City Council. The service encountered difficulties during the design phase due to the national economic situation facing the United Kingdom at the time. This required a redesign of the facility and delayed the project significantly.

3. Design considerations

Carbon Footprints' premises were constructed as part of a wider regeneration scheme overseen by MHA, which included the provision of affordable social housing. As mentioned in section 2, some of the capital funding for the project was provided by the Climate Challenge Fund to ensure that the service used environmentally friendly materials during the construction of the premises. Consideration was also given to the energy efficiency of the building. An outdoor play area, with facilities for planting and growing vegetables, was included in the plans to ensure children had access to both indoor and outdoor play experiences. Other features of the premises included the installation of a training room and community space. The use of the training room is covered in more detail later in this case study. A great deal of consideration was given to the layout of the service with staff toilets being accessible from within the main playroom to ensure minimal interruptions to the staff to child ratios. Other design aspects that are in place to enhance the experience of children attending include free-flow areas between the playrooms and a kitchen and serving area that is accessible to children. Older children and those using the out of school care can use the kitchen facility under supervision for cooking and baking, including their own snacks and lunches.

4. Staffing & local employment

It was hoped that establishing the Carbon Footprints service would create sustainable jobs for local people. This included full-time and part time positions along with employment and training opportunities for a number of modern apprentices. An additional factor in establishing a staff team comprised of people from the local area, was the desire to ensure the nursery was seen as a community nursery rather than just another childcare service.

In the report submitted to Big Lottery in 2016, the service was identified as having a total staff complement of 20, across full and part-time positions. All staff members were on permanent contracts with no temporary or zero-hours contracts. 8 staff lived in the immediate G31 postcode, with 5 of these being tenants of MHA. A further 9 members of staff lived in the wider areas of east and north-east Glasgow.

MHA provides administrative support on all aspects of human resources and all staff, including trainees, are employed under the basic terms and conditions of MHA. This includes being paid a Living Wage.

The out of school care service is supervised by a qualified playworker with other members of staff working across both services.

5. Revenue costs – Including subsidy model

The business modelling for the service included providing an increase in childcare places that would be 15% below market costs. At the time of this case study, the cost of a full-time weekly place within the Carbon Footprints Nursery ranged from £145.00-£165.00. Places for younger children were the most expensive, although all nappies and other personal care materials were included in this cost. This places the service at 4% below the average costs of nurseries run by private or third sector providers in Glasgow East for children aged 0-2. For children aged 2-3, Carbon Footprints is 9% less expensive than the local average, and for 3-5 they charge 13.5% less.

It was initially hoped that the service would provide 19 subsidised places for local people who did not have the means to pay childcare fees. Unfortunately, due to the financial difficulties outlined in section 2 of this study, it was no longer financially viable to provide such a model. However, some remodelling work was undertaken and a new model for providing some subsidised places was approved. This is still in existence at the present time and allows parents to apply for a subsidised place for a period of time. This covers a range of circumstances with examples including a sudden change in employment or salary and parents who are returning to work or further education. The subsidised place could allow them time to stabilise their income before having to pay childcare fees. The financial model that is in place to ensure viability of this scheme involves the service ring-fencing 3% of their annual turnover each year to cover the childcare costs. In the first year, the scheme was undersubscribed with only £2630 of the £4000 available being used.

Although parents are advised of the scheme at the point of registration the uptake and number of applications made is low. In 2017 the amount set aside for the scheme was £13,000, although only £2,670 was allocated. Since

2014 a total of 13 subsidised placements have been granted with a total outlay of £10,452.

6. Quality

The service performed strongly during their first Care Inspectorate inspection in October 2013, receiving two grades of 'Good' and two of 'Very good'. These grades were improved upon in their next inspection in November 2015, with the service obtaining three at 'Very Good' and one at 'Good'. The most recent inspection, from November 2017, saw a drop in grades, although only two of a possible four themes were inspected upon. The grades awarded in this inspection were 'Good' and 'Adequate' and the service received two recommendations for improvement. The report from this inspection contains numerous positive comments from parents using the service with all of those spoken to declaring that they were happy with the quality of the service. The areas identified by the Care Inspectorate as requiring improvement were how the cleaning and maintenance of the service was carried out and the quality of the play opportunities being offered to children.

During the first 3 years of the service R.E.M. Ltd put in place a raft of measures for developing and maintaining the quality of the provision. This included clear aims and objectives in key areas including the ethos and culture of the service, design of the interior space, staffing and monitoring and evaluation by the MHA Board of Directors. As the project was Big Lottery funded the service was required to evaluate and report on milestones at regular points during the funding period. This was achieved by the completion of monitoring templates designed by R.E.M. Ltd and completed by the manager, with supplementary planning meetings and self-evaluation meetings facilitated by R.E.M. Ltd.

7. Governance

Having the support of the housing association is seen as vital to the continued operation of the service, particularly in ensuring self-sufficiency. The MHA board are experienced in dealing with business functions and related decisions, which can help provide valuable support to Carbon Footprints operational capacity. The support provided by MHA includes human resources, financial planning, I.T., training, marketing and purchasing. At the time of the report for Big Lottery it was thought that the provision of this support led to savings of £60,000 per annum for Carbon Footprints.

8. Training opportunities

During the design phase of the Carbon Footprints project it was agreed that a training facility would be included within the same premises as the nursery and out of school care. The rationale behind this concept was two-fold. Firstly, the ability to host training courses for local people and secondly, to develop an in-house childcare training facility. The service has hosted numerous training related activities and events alongside a range of partners within the training suite. However, the desire for an in-house childcare training facility was not realised. This was due in part to the timescale required to establish such a facility, while other concerns were centred on how this might detract from the development of a quality nursery facility.

The training room has been used to help staff undertaking childcare related qualifications and parents who are engaged in further education. Carbon Footprints is also able to support student placements from the facility and has provided these for a number of further and higher education students from a range of colleges and universities.