

CASE STUDY



NORTH EDINBURGH CHILDCARE

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Theresa Alison, General Manager

BACKGROUND

- Size:** 57 permanent employees
- Sector:** Childcare
- Location:** Scotland
- Status:** Most recently recognised in 2008

THE ORGANISATION

Following a long campaign by a group of committed local residents for better childcare provision, North Edinburgh Childcare first opened its doors to children in the Spring of 1997. Serving the needs of people living in North Edinburgh, an area recognised as being at the top of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, North Edinburgh Childcare has grown significantly over the last 12 years and now operates after school provision at six primary schools as well as offering nursery provision for children from the age of four months. Over recent years North Edinburgh Childcare has also become a significant provider of childcare training in the City, with up to 50 students at any one time gaining level 2 and level 3 qualifications in childcare.

The organisation now provides care for approximately 80 nursery children and 280 school age children daily. It has an annual turnover of around £1.7 million, employs 57 permanent staff as well as a further 25 sessional staff to meet peaks in demand.



- **Thanks to the additional training and new policies introduced with the help of Investors in People, managers now have the skills to effectively tackle staff absence issues.**
- **Team members are much clearer about their individual responsibilities and how they can raise issues with decision makers within the company.**
- **Staff turnover has also reduced, as evidence of this, the number of advertised vacancies fell from 25 in 2005 to 20 in 2006 and then further to just 12 in 2007. This has saved the organisation many thousands of pounds in recruitment and training costs.**

While never short on enthusiasm, many of the original volunteers behind the formation of North Edinburgh Childcare lacked formal childcare qualifications. One of the significant challenges for the organisation over recent years has therefore been the need to get everyone suitably qualified to meet both the needs of the organisation as well as the requirements of the childcare regulator. Another significant challenge for the business has been around developing and maintaining effective communications with all staff as the business has grown rapidly.

HISTORY WITH INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

North Edinburgh Childcare's journey with Investors in People started almost as the organisation was formed. Identified by those behind the formation of the organisation as a mechanism for building a successful business, North Edinburgh Childcare quickly committed to achieving the Standard.

The organisation was first formally recognised as meeting the Investors in People Standard in 1999 and has since been successfully reassessed three times, with its most recent assessment being conducted using Investors in People's new choice-based approach. According to Theresa Allison, General Manager at North Edinburgh Childcare: "The Investors in People choice-based approach is a very welcome development which we really could relate to. Its flexibility meant we were able to focus our assessment on areas where we really wanted to develop over the next two to three years."

MOTIVATIONS FOR USING INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Theresa Allison identifies the following key motivating factors behind North Edinburgh Childcare's original decision to engage with the Investors in People framework:

- As a small organisation initially lacking many of the formal structures found in established businesses, North Edinburgh Childcare believed that the Investors in People framework would enable them to develop the business systems and policies necessary to build a strong and robust organisation. Commenting on this Theresa Allison states: "For a small organisation without a HR department we saw Investors in People as providing a very important support service."
- By working with Investors in People right from the inception of the organisation, managers hoped to clearly signal their strong commitment to valuing and supporting the development of the organisation's people.
- While gaining the Investors in People Standard would itself be an accolade for a new, small organisation like North Edinburgh Childcare, managers also believed that it would help engender confidence amongst both staff and parents about the organisation's commitment to excellence in all that it did.

- Managers believed that Investors in People assessments would provide them with an independent audit of how well the organisation was operating. They also believed that external funders, such as the local council, would recognise Investors in People as a quality standard and would, as a result, look more favourably upon funding bids and support applications from the organisation.
- In deciding to maintain recognition, the organisation concluded that the three-yearly assessments would enable managers to both continually identify development areas as well as measure the success of their actions following previous assessments.

BENEFITS OF INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

Engagement with Investors in People has, in the opinion of Theresa Allison, delivered a range of important and valuable benefits for North Edinburgh Childcare, including:

- Staff absenteeism, which had become an issue for the organisation, improved significantly following the most recent Investors in People assessment and subsequent action plan. The total number of days absence has fallen by an average of 20 per month since 2007, which managers believe is largely down to the new policies and training which followed the last assessment visit. Theresa Allison explains: "Thanks to the additional training and new policies introduced with the help of Investors in People, managers now have the skills to effectively tackle staff absence issues."
- Staff turnover has also reduced over the last few years thanks to improvements in staff satisfaction following the organisation's work with Investors in People. As evidence of this, the number of advertised vacancies fell from 25 in 2005 to 20 in 2006 and then further to just 12 in 2007. This has saved the organisation many thousands of pounds in recruitment and training costs.
- The organisation restructured its management to create a senior leadership team following a previous Investors in People assessment which found that staff were generally unclear about where their responsibilities began and finished. As a result, team members are much clearer about their individual responsibilities and how they can raise issues with decision makers within the company.

- The rapid growth in employees during North Edinburgh Childcare's first few years created its own challenges, especially when it came to communicating consistent messages across teams. As a result of working with Investors in People, clearer communication structures and mechanisms have now been put in place which are helping to keep staff better informed about developments within the organisation. According to managers the new approaches to communication are also engendering greater trust amongst staff that they will be consulted with about relevant issues and will all receive the same information.
- Working with investors in People has helped the organisation clarify its short, medium and long term business objectives and ensure that all team members share a common understanding of what the business stands for and is seeking to achieve.
- Investors in People recognition has also been extremely useful to the organisation when bidding for external funding. As a recognised quality standard North Edinburgh Childcare have been able to use their status as an Investor in People in applications and funding proposals.
- While the organisation has always invested significantly in developing its people, staff development plans are now much more overtly linked to the overall objectives of the business. As a result, everyone understands how their career development can contribute to achieving the business' vision.
- As a result of the more robust systems and better communication channels developed with the help of the Investors in People Standard, North Edinburgh Childcare were, according to Theresa Allison, in better shape to meet a series of recent challenges, including sizeable cuts in public funding: "Better communication meant we were able to be honest with staff about the situation and were able to tap into the talents and ideas of all staff in how we could meet these challenges."

WHERE NEXT WITH INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

North Edinburgh Childcare remain very impressed with the continuing value they gain from working with Investors in People and are committed to using it in the future. From the organisation's earliest days they have found Investors in People to be a very effective mechanism for driving continuous improvement in their business and are, in fact, already planning on using their next assessment to test whether the actions they put in place following the last assessment are having the desired affects.

Commenting on what they would say to other similar businesses thinking of engaging with Investors in People for the first time, Theresa Allison states: "Other organisations like ours should definitely seriously consider working with Investors in People. It will help any business find out both what it's doing well and where it could do better. We found the benefits of working with Investors in People were more than ten-fold the value we invested."