

Meet The Ambassador

LINDA BASTON-PITT

As the founder of a very successful nursery for 'early years' Linda Baston-Pitt came to rely on Investors in People to help weave together her educational vision and the people who would make it happen.



When The Old School House Day Nursery near Newmarket became the first nursery to be awarded Investor in People 'Champion' status in 2001, it set up a tremendous stir in the 'early years' sector of the education world. The professional media covered the story intensively because the success had demonstrated that nurseries were not locked into their own small niche but could function and be compared with businesses in the wider world.

As Linda Baston-Pitt, the owner and founder of the Old School House recalls, this was a breakthrough moment. Suddenly all the management, learning and development issues which were encompassed by Investors in People were under the spotlight and people who had not previously paid much attention to The Standard began to 'get it'.

Where to start?

In fact, as Linda points out, when she set up the nursery in 1994 (inspired by failing to find a suitable place for her own children) there had been very little available in her sector to support people development. "I wasn't really sure where to start," she recalls. "There were NVQs but no training available locally in how to achieve them."

However, as a qualified nurse and teacher (and whose mother had also set up a nursery) Linda was not entirely starting quite from scratch. Most important of all was that she had a very clear idea about the environment she wanted to create for the children. As she explains, "We believed that children deserve to have the best environment to play safely and have always taken care to design spaces that children enjoy. At the same time we maintain a family feel where staff can get to know all the children and parents."

So, having found a small disused Victorian school as premises, she set about turning her vision into reality.

Creating coherence

The Old School House offer certainly went down well. Parents in the area were desperate for high quality nursery places and the children were soon lining up to attend. The only problem was how to bring coherence to her twin objectives of creating a whole learning community and keeping up the continual pursuit of excellence. What she needed was a framework which could weave together personal and organisational development.

It was at that point that Linda started to look seriously at Investors in People. She had been aware of it for some time but what made it come alive for her was guidance from an inspirational Investors in People mentor who interpreted how Investors in People could be used to enable Linda to achieve her goals.

"Our mentor, Eva, was a former policewoman and she did a marvellous job in introducing what Investors in People was all about and how the framework could work for us."

The Old School House moved through to recognition as an Investor in People within six months and from then on Linda has been a powerful advocate for Investors in People, generous and unstinting in her advice to other organisations. The business has flourished to the point where she has a workforce of 28 and 250 children on her books while, having been appointed an Investor in People Ambassador, Linda is now very active throughout East Anglia. "I don't regard my work with Investors in People as a distraction," she says. "I see it more as part of my continuous professional development." Truly an inspirational character!