

Nursery Operations/Regional Manager of the Year

Chris Roblett, Hungry Caterpillar Day Nurseries



**‘Well-evidenced impact and clear contribution to key strategic aspects of business and teams’
Judge**

Although he has only been in the job for three years, Chris has had a huge impact on this group of nine nurseries.

He oversees the business and childcare management of the nurseries, is responsible for the day-to-day financial management of the group, and line-manages each manager.

Passionate about encouraging more men to work in childcare, Chris’s drive to increase the number of men working as practitioners – he is part of the Men in Childcare network – has had a positive impact, particularly on children who do not have male role models in their lives. His determination has led to a 500 per cent rise in the male workforce across the group. His other achievements include increasing staff retention by 65 per cent through a range of measures including staff happiness surveys, more training opportunities and a company annual ‘Superstar’ awards event.

Chris encourages staff to use their experience and abilities to find better ways of working, and not just do what they have always done.

He leads on staff training and development across the company to give staff the opportunity to progress, develop and remain up to date in an ever-changing industry, and has increased the number, and raised the profile of, apprentices. This included developing the in-house staff training programme to include five paid training days a year. Occupancy has also risen under

his watch to 90 per cent across all sites through initiatives including regular parent happiness surveys, refer a friend incentives, and setting up an active parent forum at all nurseries.

His work with parents includes sessions on healthy eating and transition to school, and launching a local primary school network to build bridges between school and nursery. He has also developed and launched the group’s early language programme. Working with the wider community, Chris sits on two children’s centre development committees in Ealing. He also instigated regular deputy manager meetings to give deputies the chance to have their say, which are very popular with the staff. Lisa Rae, deputy manager at the Hanwell nursery, says, ‘I speak on behalf of all the deputies at Hungry Caterpillars when I say it has been an empowering initiative with clear guidelines and a great professional and personal boost.’

Nursery manager Ela Konyardi at the West Twyford nursery adds, ‘Chris has been really supportive of me and the West Twyford team. His mentoring has helped to motivate me and given me the confidence to take on the role of manager. No matter is too small and he is always there to answer my questions and guide me through different issues. With Chris by my side as support I feel confident that I’m delivering the best possible care and education for all my families and supporting their various needs.’

Chris has successfully turned around a ‘requires improvement’ nursery to a Good grade, and helped two nurseries to Outstanding. Nursery manager Audrey Stewart from the Stanburn setting says, ‘Working with Chris is like a breath of fresh air. A big thank you Chris for the enthusiasm you bring to the team at Stanburn. It is lovely to see his expression light up when he sees a new display board or how we use our budget for new resources.’

‘Personally, Chris has shown confidence in my leadership and that in turn has given me a huge confidence boost. With his help my nursery achieved Outstanding at our inspection earlier this year. We couldn’t have done it without his support.’

Finalists

James Crosswell, Kids Allowed
Catherine Denyer, Mama Bears Day Nursery
Kristina Johnson, Mon Ami Children’s Nurseries
Andrea Moore, 4Children

Criterion

Open to senior employees of nursery groups working across some or all of the company’s settings