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I graduated from Leeds University with a BSc Hons in Mechanical Engineering in 1984 and knew pretty much then that I was never going to be a good engineer. It just didn't interest me enough. However, it did provide me with the opportunity to learn project management and business skills that would serve me well in later life. Twenty years later, in 2004 I found myself as general manager of an engineering construction company. I had all the trappings of corporate success, but I really wanted to run my own business rather than work for other people. My partner, Suzanne, had been working in the education sector for 20 years and she suggested we set up a consultancy to advise Outside School Hours Services on how to meet the newly instigated NCAC guidelines for the OSHC sector. I countered with the proposition that we could set up our own business to do that ourselves. Suzanne would handle the childcare aspects of the service and I would handle the business side of things. And so the concept of Primary OSHCare was born.

From the outset we were determined to change the way things were done in the sector. Our assessment at the time was that the sector was extremely fragmented. Many services were being operated by voluntary committees who tended to view OSH care as 'child minding' rather than a real opportunity to positively impact on the lives of children and their families. Also, the educators were drastically undervalued and underappreciated.

In July 2004 we opened our first service at Dulwich Hill Primary School. This was quickly followed by services in Bondi, Gordon and Ashfield. It was all a bit chaotic and, as we acquired more services, it became clear to me that we had to get the expertise residing in Suzanne's head down on paper. I'm a great believer in systems. In fact, I would go so far as to say that no organisation can successfully function without a clearly articulated and codified set of processes, along with an equally clearly written vision for what the organisation is about and why it exists. It never ceases to amaze me how many businesses fail to do this—and consequently fail! It wasn't easy, but we wrote down every aspect of operating an OSHC service. We also wrote a clear set of goals for the business and we precisely defined the values that underpin our whole reason for existence. This is a critical and powerful undertaking that allowed us to understand and deliver consistent highest quality care at every service we operated. And it's a never-ending task. We are constantly reviewing and revising how we do things as we gain more experience.

Having a set of written procedures and values is one thing, but they are of no use if nobody knows about them or adheres to them. Our job as leaders is to make these available to all our staff, train them in how to use them and constantly reinforce their implementation. We do this through a combination of cutting-edge IT systems, induction, training and, probably most importantly, leading by example. We have high expectations of people who choose to work with us. We have deliberately built a culture of excellence, which all our employees must buy into. The net result is that we are an OSHC provider in 36 schools and cater for 3500 children each week. In our most recent assessments by the regulatory authority we have been awarded 15 'Exceeding the Standards' ratings. We have raised the bar in the sector and significantly improved the experience of all stakeholders who come into contact with us—children, families, school communities, regulators and our staff.

There is a persistent idea among some people that there is something inherently wrong or immoral about running OSH care as a business: that it is exploiting the children and their families. I couldn't disagree more strongly. While there are, no doubt, some unscrupulous operators, I firmly believe that sound financial management has to underpin any operation if it is to be sustainable in the long term. It is possible to provide excellence without exploitation. We don't charge high fees to families and we don't skimp on resources or underpay any staff. We just constantly make sure everything we do is the best we can do. As a consequence, we now have a very successful business that is demonstrably exceeding all the standards. As we continue to grow, we are able to broaden our

influence in ways we never dreamed of at the start. We are able to support local communities and charities. We are able to influence policy makers and regulators. We are able to provide children with opportunities and experiences that all too many simply do not get.

Suzanne and I sit at the top of a vibrant, dynamic organisation that genuinely improves people's lives and hopefully contributes to improving the sector as a whole. It's very exciting ... and we are only just getting going!

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