

Essex Early Years and Childcare Service

Marketing of your childcare business

The COVID-19 lockdown has impacted family and business in many ways. It is becoming clear that many families do not intend to return to the same activities, and are now making different life choices, than they did before March 2020.

Understandably, the early years and childcare sector has been affected by this. As lockdown eases and children can return to their previous patterns of attendance in childcare settings, the demand for childcare could change. Many parents may choose to reconsider their previous choices.

Early Years and Childcare providers that would normally be operating at their preferred occupancy could now find themselves with unexpected vacancy, or lower than expected enquiries. Marketing and promotion activities may need to be more direct or reviewed in line with the changing way in which parents access information.

Essex Early Years and Childcare Service have developed a marketing plan template as a starting point for any provider who wants to put a plan in place to set out the steps they will take to increase their occupancy and market their services accordingly.

<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/running-your-business/early-years-business-sustainability/>

Below are some direct marketing activities and options that you may have already explored, trying for the first time, or may wish to re-visit;

- Door to door leaflet drops
- Parish magazine adverts
- Posters in key places such as doctor's surgeries and pharmacies etc
- Visits to groups such as parent and baby sessions, stay and play sessions, weigh in clinics etc (when running)
- Local soft play area leaflet drops and visits

Linking with partners or other businesses;

- Children and Family Health and Well Being Service - Family Hubs (formally known as children's centres)
- Schools
- Local businesses – to advertise but also as a link for employees with children
- Back to Business Essex - providing additional free business support in conjunction with Essex County Council: -

<https://www.backtobusinessessex.co.uk/>

Utilising social media, for example;

- Facebook:
 - ✓ Raising your profile as a business
 - ✓ Promotion to parents
 - ✓ Knowing your audience
 - ✓ Targeting your marketing
- Instagram:
 - ✓ Visual storytelling

Advertising websites, for example;

- Essex early years and schools recruitment service
<http://www.essexschoolsjobs.co.uk/>
- Online services such as Childcare.co.uk <http://www.Childcare.co.uk>
- Essex County Council Family Information service (see section at end of this document for more information)
<https://www.essex.gov.uk/family-information-service>

Competitor Analysis is vital to any marketing campaign.

- Why “get to know” our competitors?

Having a full knowledge of local competitors can boost your position in the market but helping you understand what you do differently and what you believe you also could or already do better.

- Do you have an up to date record of your competitor charges and fees?

Knowing this can ensure your services and “offer” are competitively and appropriately priced for target audience

- Do you advertise and market your service highlighting the USP’s (unique selling points) you specifically have compared to your competitors?

Knowing your USP’s could be the element that separates you from your competitors, bringing added appeal and drawing in more families.

- Are your competitors thinking of bringing a new offer in such as extended hours or wrap around care?

Try considering your business model and if this is something you can adapt, you may be able to avoid losing families.

- Who are your competitors targeting?

Your business plan and model may indicate that you have a different target audience to your competitors, if this is the case, make sure your marketing and advertising are tailored to your specific target audience.

- Do you regularly review competitor websites?

Can be a great way to further understand your competitors offer and how they package the hours and products they sell. You may be even able to sign up to email alerts.

Market Research guidance and template documents

<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/getting-started/setting-up-a-group-provision/>

There are a variety of resources available to support you, so do also look at what your membership organisation has to offer.

Early Years Alliance <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/>

PACEY <https://www.pacey.org.uk/>

NDNA <https://www.ndna.org.uk/>

Out of School Alliance <https://www.outofschoolalliance.co.uk/>

(Please note that memberships for these organisations do come at a cost)

Advertising your business to families through the Essex Families Information Service.

All settings in Essex are able to promote their service to families looking for childcare through the Family information Service (FIS) childcare search

<https://secureweb1.essex.gov.uk/FIS>

The descriptive summary of a setting that can be entered under “additional information” gives parents a fuller explanation of the services you offer and is a great way to advertise your business.

Some providers haven’t taken up the option to include this or to update it but this can be done very easily at any time by following the instructions on page 4 of the “self-update portal guidance” <https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/media/1971/self-update-portal-guidance-acceessible.pdf> and typing the descriptive summary of your service in the “other information” box.

Suggestions on what to include are:

- The values and ethos of your setting.
- Ofsted grading, ratios and qualification levels.
- An explanation of your building and surroundings (are your rooms fully accessible? Do you have parking? Is there a secure garden? Do you link with local schools)

- Added services and experiences (home cooked meals? other languages spoken? Forest School? pets?)
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Local Offer You are also asked to use this entry to summarise your settings Local Offer for children with SEND.

Guidance on what to include are in this document

<https://eycp.essex.gov.uk/media/1423/g-early-years-provider-website-contents-5-delivering-the-eyfs-1-eyfs-documents-for-new-website-4-promote-equality-and-inclusion-send-local-offer-suggestions-for-ey-provider-portal-entry.pdf>