

“WE’RE NOT JUST SINGING RHYMES”

Do Re Mi Day Nursery is a setting inspired by music. Over two articles, *TN* speaks to Jane Todd about her fledgling business and the philosophy behind her approach to early years...



I'd been teaching for 12 years, become acting head at my prep school, and had just finished my doctorate in education, so I'd started to think, what now?" Jane Todd tells me. For many the answer might have been to have a bit of a break; instead, Jane - also mum to one-year-old Reuben - decided to open Do Re Mi Day Nursery (Doremidaynursery.com), a setting with her passion for musical learning at its heart.

"I could see the amazing effect music was having in my son's life, but whenever we visited one of the local musical classes, it was really just singing nursery rhymes," Jane says of her inspiration. "I'd looked into taking on a franchise but the attitude seemed to be 'no musical expertise needed'. I thought, hang on, I'm the antithesis of this. I've spent 13 years studying and they're saying, 'We just want you to have fun!' Surely we can marry the two together? The teaching I'd done was

founded very much on the Kodály methodology, and using that approach I felt I could sow seeds, placing foundations for development later - the children would be singing and having a nice time, while we were actually embedding real musical learning.

"When I started looking at the idea more closely, it occurred to me that there must be others like me who'd love their children to have this deeper musical learning, but who had to go to work. So I thought, what if under one roof I offered everything for musical development in the early years - a musical nursery and classes alongside it for those who didn't need daycare?"

Starting out

Short on capital but determined to get started as soon as possible, Jane set about finding a venue for her classes whilst she saved for her nursery. In the event she discovered a home for both, and settled upon a plan to bring Do Re Mi to local families. "It all started to happen quite fast," she admits. "Once I'd looked into the Ofsted process, I thought the most realistic starting date for the nursery was January 2014; but I went part-time at my school at the end of the summer and started the classes in September, so people could get an idea of what Do Re Mi was about."

A helping hand for this first step came in the form of funding from Arts Council England, which agreed to subsidise Jane's classes to the tune of nearly £5,000. "I wanted to make the classes accessible to as many people as possible," Jane says. "I looked into the prices people paid to some of the larger franchises, and it seemed to be about £5 per session, which I felt might be a barrier to people coming along and their children benefiting. Gaining funding meant my classes had to be not-for-profit in the beginning, but it helped to build up the name of business, and allowed me to invest in the resources I needed. I spent a lot on getting the right tools for the job - proper

wooden, natural instruments which came from Sound Children," she adds; "there's no point saying we want to do it properly then buying some brightly coloured plastic."

Her approach quickly paid off, with interest strong. "We had a waiting list from around week four," Jane says, "and I'm having to double the number of places I'm offering. There's obviously a need, and people want to come."

Business support

While Do Re Mi's classes were quick to launch, more planning was required for the nursery itself. Aware that she didn't have all of the necessary skills and expertise to get her setting up and running, and struggling to find funding, Jane approached Durham Creatives (Durhamcreatives.co.uk), a support programme for those running creative businesses. "They gave me time in business mentoring, and recommended me for a business start-up loan as well as funding some time with a photographer and a day of PR support, which was very useful," she explains. "I hadn't had any previous experience of running a business, so I knew it wasn't going to be easy. But I'm very passionate, very driven and I work hard."

Following an official opening in November, attended by Labour MP Roberta Blackman-Woods, Do Re Mi opened to the public in January this year, providing 39 places, including a six-place baby room. But though the challenges involved in getting the business off the ground have been overcome, it's clear that the hard work isn't over: "I gave up teaching at Christmas, though I'll still be lecturing and leading seminars at the university," Jane tells us. "But I'll be based here most days - and my son will be here too!"

Next issue, *TN* looks at the Kodály-inspired learning embedded within Jane's classes and setting.

WE'RE ENCOURAGING CHILDREN TO HAVE FUN WITH THE INSTRUMENTS BUT TO RESPECT THEM AS WELL - TO SEE MUSIC AS SOMETHING TO BE VALUED