

PARENTS & CARERS' STATEMENTS - 9TH FEBRUARY 2024

X and X (parents with a child at Fernbank):

Our first child began at Fernbank when she was six months old. I run a Hackney based, female-founded business on Hackney Road. Like most independent business owners, (especially women) the thought of paying for extortionate childcare costs and not being able to be at home with my child was a daunting life decision to make... until we met the wonderful staff and carers at Fernbank Children's centre. It's thanks to them and their second-to-none care of our daughter I was able to grow my business and my partner (also an independent business owner in Hackney) could feel safe in the knowledge our child would have an excellent start to her first years.

We lived in Dalston but walked the three mile round trip (six miles in total daily) to Fernbank: being the only centre with spaces and affordable childcare we could find and on the recommendations of other local parents. A month ago we moved, solely to be closer to Fernbank, and for our second child to start there in the coming months as both our business expanded.

The news of potential closure has shattered us. Without Fernbank and its incredible staff, I'm not sure how we would have raised/ will raise two small children and two businesses, it doesn't bear thinking about. We are indebted to Fernbank, its potential closure (and severe lack of alternatives nearby) being horrifically detrimental to our local businesses and lives.

X (parent with a child at Fernbank):

Fernbank Children's Centre is amazing for our family. The care and education my son receives there is vital to us and so enriching for my son. The staff are warm and caring, dedicated and experienced, and I never worried about leaving my son there when I returned to work, especially since I had time to get to know staff beforehand as we regularly attended stay and play sessions in Fernbank, as well as at other Children's Centres, while I was on maternity leave. The nursery has given him access to things I cannot provide at home such as garden space and time with his peers, plus he receives an amazing variety of food and exposure to other cultures and ideas. I see him coming home with new knowledge constantly, new songs, new understandings of things, good practices and wonderful friends.

My husband died last year leaving me to suddenly be the sole carer of our son. The staff at Fernbank have been so supportive during this unimaginable time, particularly his key worker, Paulette, and Laura from the management team. The role they have played has been invaluable, they even ensured we had access to their book library where they have books for children around death and loss specifically suitable for his young age. I was so fortunate to be in the position of having my son in a nursery where the fees immediately were reduced to match my new unexpected change in household income, meaning I didn't have to consider changes to

my working hours or find a new childcare solution at a time when offering stability to my son is so important, as is my need to not reduce my household income further by changing my ability to work full time. The proposed closures bring an added stress of potentially more upheaval at an already difficult time, along with financial difficulties around childcare and employment as a single income household.

Aside from the impact on my family, I oppose the proposed closure for the impact it will have on all families, both now and in the future, who should have access to this wonderful Centre.

I also have concerns around staff redundancies. It seems incomprehensible to propose making committed, experienced staff redundant during a recruitment and retention crisis when the government is so desperate for Early Years workers that it is offering £1000 incentives for new childcare staff.

X (Parent of a child at Hillside):

I chose this nursery because it was the only one where we visited and she felt right at home. I was talking to the manager and the other children were actually going for a nap. My daughter almost fell asleep in her future career's arms, named Kombe. A lot of people call her mama Kombe because she has such maternal instincts that you can feel and see it straight away. Her key person was Zohre, who loved my child like a mom would, being proud of her achievements and cuddling her whenever she needed it (my daughter is more sensitive and needs more relatedness, more cuddles sometimes, she always gets them). Then she loves Amanda, who is young and cool, she dances and sings with them, challenges her to be independent. I just can't thank them enough.

We had an independent person reviewing her growth and abilities and she aced every task she put in front of her, every situation, she has developed in the best way possible, I am so happy we decided to have found this place (had to find it on google maps, not much info on other sites).

She transitioned to the big room without issues and her new person is Marcey and she got attached to her quite fast, she does sneak in other places to see her other favourite people. Gladys, Marva and Majlinda are very welcoming in the reception area, friendly and helpful, we always have little chats about my daughter, share impressions and pictures from our holidays. We even share or exchange toys by asking them to do that for us and they're always happy to do it. Yes, I do know all of their names because they became our family, they care about our little bundle of joy and make her day wonderful, always coming home with a smile on her face, a few times she wanted to stay there even longer. The staff themselves are a family and you can see it just by their interactions.

We know each other as parents as well and even formed a small group that meet up, go to the park, events together, share ideas, toys, clothes and resources, and have the most amazing playdates. We are a tight community that you wish to dismantle and bring not only sadness but

higher costs, forcing us to go private (if you can afford it, which we can't) right when you promised us more free hours..

We think the decision to make these changes was taken before exploring different solutions instead of the ones proposed. Have you tried to look into what other councils did? For instance, councils like Richmond upon Thames, Merton, Croydon, Sutton, and Kingston upon Thames signed a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation and shared services. Sharing resources between themselves in order to not fire anyone and still have cost reductions? Merging different services doesn't mean you need less people, just cost reduction ideas like buying bulk.

The documents you provided are not inclusive, no description added to pictures, impossible for any disabled person to read them (even by using software designed for it), and images that are blurry so even the ones that do not have a disability are not able to see the data provided. Chat GPT maybe could have helped with some new proposal ideas but will never know, it cannot upload the PDF...

All of this made us feel sad and outraged and then to top it up, you tried to make Ora, Head of Centre at Fernbank, redundant before the consultations even began? What are we supposed to expect next? I can tell you what we expect: for the council to back us up in front of the government and either pull from its reserve, or find better solutions whilst collaborating and learning from others. I know for sure there is a Slack platform, used by different councils to collaborate, please use it..

X (Parent of child at Fernbank):

When our son was a few months old we began asking around for recommendations of local nurseries to send him to. Fernbank came highly recommended by several of our neighbours whose children have all been there in years gone by. They all mentioned the fantastic staff and amazing facilities including the wonderful outside space and forest school.

As soon as we stepped inside Fernbank for our first visit we instantly had a warm welcoming feeling. The staff were smiling, all the children were happy and busy in their activities. This was not always common when we were looking around other local places.

It's very important to us that our son is exposed to children from all kinds of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and other places we'd visited were far less diverse, likely due to the high fees, making them inaccessible to many local families.

We are a working family, both parents work in the creative industry full time, one is self-employed, so we needed to find somewhere that we could afford, with an atmosphere that felt safe and comfortable, and where we believed our son would be amongst a true reflection of society, not a privileged minority.

Since starting our son's confidence and abilities have come on leaps and bounds, we never have any concerns and know he's in very safe hands, receiving lots of attention and care, not to mention an amazing menu of nutritious and varied meals every day.

He comes back home every evening with a spring in his step and we can see he's had a fun-filled day with his friends and the staff who clearly care deeply for all the children in their care.

My son and I were also very lucky to be able to go to the 'stay and play' at the Children's Centre before he started nursery full time, while I was on maternity leave. We're very grateful that this was possible, he was able to get used to the building and meet some of the staff, and it allowed me as a nervous first-time mother to feel comfortable and safe leaving him there in the nursery when the time came.

The thought of losing affordable places like Fernbank in Hackney is truly devastating. It is going to drive many families out of the area, and force some parents to stop working if there are no affordable places for their children to go during the day.

X (Parent of two children at Fernbank):

Our two year old daughter and five year old son (who has now moved on to school) owe a huge part of their wellbeing to the nurturing care and professionalism provided by the staff at Fernbank. I'll never forget our first visit there and seeing the centre manager welcome every single child and parent by name as they came through the door. Centres like Fernbank, Hillside and Sebright are beacons of light in our communities - where parents of all incomes can bring their children for guaranteed quality of care. What better use of council money than to help give every child the best possible start? Hackney will be worse off in every sense if these centres close and we implore the council to (once again) reconsider their proposals.

X (parent with a child at Fernbank):

There are limited affordable childcare options in the area. Fernbank offers this. Along with a great space and some wonderful staff members.

The closure of the children centres feeds the hands of the private sector.

It limits the choices and availability for parents and will massively impact struggling, working parents.

There are long waiting lists for the other local children centres so you are giving the parents no options impacting both them and the children.

X - Parent with a child at Fernbank:

Our daughter, who was 6 months old at the time, has two siblings who went to Fernbank. With most of the staff serving long tenures at the nursery, it was a familiar community worth moving close by for. We had previously visited many nurseries close to where we were before deciding

to move. Not one of the private nurseries we had visited compared to the commitment of care, community and diversity that Fernbank offers. As our daughter would spend a third of her time at nursery, the choice is not a light decision to make. The staff at Fernbank are incredibly hard working and skilled carers that we trust completely. Fernbank has exceeded our expectations as a nursery. Beyond the attention and care that the staff provide to all the children, there is a real sense of community. Because of the socio economic diversity at the nursery, I have met parents from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Much of the reason for why Fernbank is unique in its tiered pricing, and therefore less exclusive. What stands Fernbank out is that everyday our daughter learns about the importance of diversity and community, how to treat her peers with compassion and equality, and celebrate different cultures. No other nursery that we visited could come close in comparison providing anything similar for our daughter. Each member of staff that I have had the pleasure of engaging with, are exceptionally loyal, committed and keen to work on our daughter's development. Without their attuned care and attention to her growth, we as her parents would not have been able to be as productive as we are. Each day I drop my daughter with ease, knowing that she is in the best care we can get. This means we are able to work in the day tackling other issues at ease knowing we won't need to worry about our daughter. Fernbank's commitment to our daughter has been paramount to her development; her confidence, ability to socialise and handle herself amongst her peers, empathise, be independent and motivated to learn. Mostly run by women from all different backgrounds and ages, it would be an absolute devastating move to dismantle this community and the care that they have managed to successfully build and manage over such a long period of time.

X (parent with a child at Hillside):

We came across Hillside Children's Centre quite randomly as my wife attended an adult training course there and noticed that there was childcare provided in the centre. We had visited a few different private nurseries in and around Stoke Newington and Stamford Hill none of which were ideal in terms of waitlists, outdoor areas or opening hours. On our initial visit to the centre I was immediately taken with how open and friendly the staff were and with the warm environment the centre provided. He has been there 4 days a week since 11 months old and has now just turned 3 and entered the preschool room. It was definitely one of the best decisions we've ever made to sign our child up to Hillside. Kombe, Amanda, Zohre and all of his carers have been wonderful and given him so much love and encouragement, and patience when he speaks quietly, or when he had trouble learning to walk. The joy that Zohre and her colleagues showed when he started to walk without being held, it was truly like he was their own son. The Hillside team made a special effort to encourage us to get a referral to a physio for his walking, which we needed as first time parents. The team followed all of the physio's recommendations, and followed all of the exercises our child needed to do, and even welcomed the physio to observe him at Hillside.

As a boy with a good appetite he loves eating the varied and healthy food chef Andrew and the Hillside kitchen provides. My wife spoke to someone who works at Hillside occasionally who said that she loves working there in part because of the food! Judging by the menus at some

private centres and how pleased our son is with telling us with what he ate, we know that not all nursery children are so lucky!

A big part of who we are as a family is being open to children and adults from all different backgrounds and Hillside is really such a wonderful mix of the families that live in Hackney. From the moment we walk into Hillside in the morning and drop him off and get our welcome from Gladys or Marva or Majinda or whoever lets us in, we know that we're leaving him in the best possible care, and with people who will look after him and support his growth and learning. It would be such a horrendous shame to not keep the centre open, and deprive lower income earners and the whole community of the fantastic care provided by the staff at Hillside, which should serve as a beacon for other nurseries, never stopped.

X & X (parents with a child at Fernbank):

My husband and I have been out of work for 8 months, we are both freelancers and whereas I have been on statutory maternity leave until September, there has been close to no income in our household for a while. The fact that Fernbank allows us to pay the lower fee gives us a better chance to try to get back on our feet faster than if we'd wait until both of us found jobs paying enough to support the extortionate costs of private nurseries.

This is our first baby and Fernbank was the first nursery we visited out of a handful and the one we chose. We are vegan and use cloth nappies and our choices are well accommodated and respected, this is something that we'd have to fight for in private nurseries.

We love the diversity and plurality of backgrounds in the nursery and we know Fernbank is proud to have such a range of children attending. This is a great foundation to build tolerant and empathetic humans and should be highlighted as one of the most important things of our public nurseries.

Our daughter started a week before we were sent the heartbreaking email about the closures, and it took that long to be sure the staff is a great loving family that takes such good care of our baby. We cannot imagine having to look for another option, nor can we fathom the impact this is going to have in the staff's lives. It is truly unbelievable that such cuts are being done under a labour council.

X and X (parents with a child at Fernbank):

Fernbank Children's Centre has been an incredible nursery for our child to attend, and of huge value to our family. We chose to send our daughter because of the direct access to the garden from all rooms, something that is incredibly rare even in private settings, and we kept her there because of the impeccable care and loving warmth the staff provide the children.

The stand-out factor for us however when choosing our childcare setting, which IS STILL very important to us, is that our child gets to socialise with children who come from different backgrounds, both culturally and economically - especially in her early years when their brains are developing so much. This environment is something that we believe would have been different if we had sent her to a nursery where fees are fixed.

Fernbank embodies what we strongly believe affordable childcare brings to a community, raising a group of children who are naturally accepting and without fear of people who are different to them. Weaving into the fabric of their understanding that we are all unique and different, and come from different circumstances, but that we can still live and love alongside each other.

We cannot thank Fernbank enough for providing this environment, celebrating children from all backgrounds and marking holidays from all faiths in equal standing. As a mixed race and multi-faith couple it has given us an enormous sense of belonging, so I can only imagine the level of acceptance our child must also feel.

In an increasingly polarising society we cannot see a more important mission as affordable nurseries like Fernbank especially in a community such as Hackney. The non-prioritisation of affordable childcare is short-sighted for the future citizens that are being raised here and therefore, for this reason – and so many more - we strongly oppose the plans for closure of any affordable childcare settings.

X & X (parents with a child at Hillside):

Our son started at Hillside when he was nine months old and has flourished during the year he has spent there. Unlike many of the privately-run nurseries we visited, Hillside emanated a sense of warmth, stability, and professionalism. Instead of being greeted by temporary agency staff, we met staff who have been there long enough to know not just the names of all the children, but also those of their parents and older siblings who had previously attended the centre. The staff in the baby room (Zohre, Christine, Solange, Elizabeth and others) demonstrate, on a daily basis, that they are not just invested in our son's safety, but also in his happiness and emotional and physical development; they encouraged him to take his first steps, eat with a fork, and babble his first words. It is also amazing to witness him learn about himself and the world around him among such a diverse group of children. Most importantly, Hillside's continued opening as a children's centre for ages 0-5 is crucial to ensuring there are affordable childcare options in this area of Hackney. The fees in privately-run nurseries were often so extortionate that it would make no financial sense for both of us to return to work. Childcare costs contribute significantly to women not returning to paid employment after becoming mothers, which in turn fuels the gender pay gap and maintains a glass ceiling for women in the workplace. As such, adequate and affordable childcare is an absolute necessity in a borough that strives for equality, diversity & inclusion.

X & X (parents with a child at Hillside):

Our son attended Hillside for 2 years from the age of three until he started school last year. He is still friends with a number of the children he met there. Hillside is an incredible nursery, with dedicated, skilled staff, many of whom have worked there for years. Our son loved every minute of his time and always came home happy and nourished. His key person, Joycelyn, was just wonderful and helped our son develop and grow throughout his time at the nursery. We were part of the previous campaign to keep the nursery open and can't tell you how disappointed and angry we are that this is now happening again. Despite what has been put forward by the Council, there is a genuine lack of affordable childcare in this area of Hackney. We would have really struggled to find any kind of affordable high-quality childcare without Hillside as an option. Hillside welcomes children and families from all backgrounds and income brackets, creating an amazing environment that is both inclusive and dynamic. We strongly urge the council not to close this vital community resource and to invest in the future of its children and families.

X and X (parents of a child at Fernbank):

My daughter is our first child and I was very careful and did a lot of research when choosing her nursery. Before discovering Fernbank, I went to see 7 nurseries but struggled finding a place that I felt great about. Before starting nursery school there, I took my daughter to their stay and play sessions as they offered the most interesting sessions from music class to muddy play sessions, so when I discovered that there was a nursery connected to the children's centre, I knew immediately, it was going to be a good place. Moreover, someone I met through the stay and play session told me that their daughter goes to Fernbank and they really love what they do. My daughter started Fernbank when she was 8 months old and I've always appreciated how great the nursery is. All the staff are so passionate and experienced, my daughter loves their big garden and with their well thought out curriculum, she has developed so much and made lovely friends. There is a very good diversity in the school and they celebrate everyone's culture, something we dearly cherish and know we may not get such a diverse mix of cultures in a private nursery. Losing such a life affirming place like this creates such disbelief about what Hackney council looks for in the future for communities. It creates worry and undue anxiety for both young parents and people who want to be parents in the near future. We want Fernbank to stay indefinitely as a core pillar of our community so it can nurture and care for our kids.

X and X (parents of child at Fernbank):

When I had my daughter I found myself really understanding what my mum used to say to me, 'We just want the best for you'. This really echoed in my mind when we started to look for a nursery place for her.

I found out about Fernbank through a friend, who's daughter attends the centre. I remember my first visit, I walked in and had an immediate sense of calm and warmth. I just knew that the nursery would offer my daughter the best care. Fernbank has been a brilliant place where I have

seen our child thrive. I have complete faith and trust in the staff that look after her. Ola has been there for ten years and I can tell how much she is committed to the children's development. Knowing that our child is in such kind hands has made it easier for me to return to work. It's not easy juggling work and kids, but knowing that your child is being well looked after makes the emotional adjustment a lot easier. Without Fernbank I am not sure where our child would be, probably a private nursery that we would only just about afford for a year until our mortgage rate increases. Closing special centres like Fernbank are just another example of unnecessary cuts that kill services at the heart of the community. Ultimately, Fernbank is irreplaceable, my heart sinks every time I even think of the prospect of it not being there.

X and X (parents with child at Fernbank):

When we started searching for nurseries we hadn't realised what a huge challenge it would be. We visited around 7 in the area, and even started our child at one, a private space that we were deeply disappointed in from the start. After removing our child from there, we came across Fernbank – and what an incredible difference we found there. From the moment we stepped through the door for our show round we knew it was the right place for our child – warm, friendly, accepting, fun and professional. Our child started at Fernbank at the age of one, and at every stage she has been so happy to go there, and we have felt informed and supported each step of the way. The team there work tirelessly to ensure that every child feels a sense of safety and belonging, and the personal nature of the interactions with staff across the board make it such a special place.

Fernbank is a place that welcomes and embraces children and parents from across Hackney's diverse community, and that is something that should be championed and developed. The idea that Hackney council would consider closing such a space is heartbreaking and makes us wonder what they expect so many parents to do in terms of childcare – as there simply won't be enough places for the children to go. We can't imagine our child's early years without Fernbank and all of the wonderful staff, children and parents who make up the community there, and we can only hope that the centre can remain open and continue to serve the people who love it so dearly.

X and X (2 children previously at Fernbank):

When we decided to have children we were still fairly young and hadn't thought ahead about the finer details of childcare costs. As two lower income earners with no family support or network in the area, we felt so daunted once we started looking into the local nurseries.

A friend of a friend recommended Fernbank as her child was there. I saw a few nurseries, and whilst some of these had more modern buildings and equipment, the heartfelt approach we got from Fernbank and its staff meant we immediately knew that was where we wanted our child to go. When we had a second child five years later, there was no question or discussion of where she would go. Knowing the same loyal staff would be looking after her was so reassuring. Families with multiple kids return time after time, and often outside of the borough, because of the Fernbank team and the care they offer.

People need affordable childcare more than ever. Affordable does not mean our children receive a lesser service. We still recommend the nursery and have a few friends with children there at present. The staff are so much more than nursery teachers, from the office team to the chefs - they go above and beyond.

I'll never forget their dedication and perseverance in the face of Covid and 2022's threatened closure. We showed up for them then, and we'll keep showing up for them when they need us, as they do for our kids.

X (parent of children who previously attended Fernbank):

When I found out I was pregnant with twins I soon knew childcare costs would be prohibitive and would even potentially stop me returning to work, so early on in maternity leave I scouted out Fernbank Nursery and got my boys on the waiting list. I delayed returning to work to secure my place as I could only afford to send my children there. Once they were in I felt like I had hit the jackpot! The nursery gave them an incredible start in education, they were happy and cared for by the fantastic staff. The space is great and the outdoor forest school area is so important to many of us who do not have gardens.

Having been part of the initial campaign to save Fernbank I'm devastated we are here again. Private Childcare is astronomical in Hackney and even as someone who would be considered a good earner I couldn't afford the average cost of the private nurseries. How can we let early childcare provision become the domain of the rich? In such a diverse place as Hackney we must have affordable childcare.

X (parent of a child at Hillside):

My 2.5-year-old daughter has been attending Hillside Nursery since last October, which coincided with our move to Stoke Newington. We visited several nurseries, including some private ones, but Hillside Nursery was definitely our top choice. At home, we speak Turkish, so the nursery provided our daughter with her first exposure to English. The staff was incredibly welcoming and warm right from the start. Since we don't have any family nearby, having the nursery felt like a blessing; they became like an extended family to us.

Our daughter's English skills have improved significantly, and she has adapted well to the routines at Hillside. The various activities and outings, such as visits to the library, have greatly contributed to her education. Her time at Hillside has made her more self-sufficient and helpful, which has been wonderful to see. Initially, like many parents, I was hesitant about sending my child to nursery, but thanks to Hillside, I now feel confident knowing that she enjoys her time there.

She adores her friends and teachers at Hillside, and she talks about them every day. One of the beautiful aspects of Hillside is its inclusivity, as it already accommodates SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) children. I believe maintaining a mixed nursery environment is important, as converting Hillside solely for SEND children would deprive families like ours of a

valuable resource. Finding a good, affordable nursery isn't always easy, and Hillside has been a blessing in that regard.

X - attends class at Fernbank Children's Centre - hoping to send LO in August:

After much research and a handful of visits to nurseries in the area, I quickly became set on Fernbank. Not only is it one of the only local nurseries to differentiate fees according to household income (so precious to me as a single parent) but the environment and staff, when I visited, were, by far, the best I'd come across. Until visiting Fernbank, I'd become incredibly worried that I wasn't going to be able to afford anything of good quality for my daughter. As a result of choosing this nursery as my nursery of choice, I started attending the music class on Mondays so my daughter would recognise someone when she settled in 6 months time. No other nursery I know offers anything like this. The sessions there are so warm and cheerful and the babies/toddlers get free fruit and drinks too. To hear that Fernbank's future is uncertain is, quite honestly, filling me with dread and I urge the council to think closely about the lives this decision will be effecting

X and X (parents of a child at Fernbank nursery):

We have a son who joined Fernbank at 2 years old. He has been at the nursery for 1.5 years. We were extremely anxious as our child was born during covid, therefore had restricted access to meet and socialise with other children. We were not sure at first where to send him. However, When the restrictions were lifted and children could attend stay and play sessions, Fernbank was one of our favourite places to go every week. The staff at Fernbank made him feel so welcomed and it made him feel very safe and comfortable. We could see the amazing changes in his confidence and social skills.

The staff are all so warm and friendly and are always happy to make time for the parents and children. When our son started the nursery, settling in was very difficult for him. However, the staff at Fernbank were very supportive and accommodated his needs and made us feel very reassured as parents. 1.5 years later, our son is the happiest little boy and loves going to nursery and being around the children and staff. He has built special bonds with a lot of the staff and his peers, and it is so nice to witness this daily. The team there work endlessly to make sure the children feel a sense of belonging and their needs are met. Our son has speech delay and the staff at Fernbank have put everything in place to support him and his needs, so he always feels included. We love how inclusive and diverse the nursery is and we are gutted to hear the sad news of the council wanting to close the children centres down. We really hope that the centres can remain open and continue to support the community.

X (parent to 4 children, all of whom attended Fernbank CC):

After visiting many nurseries in our local area (islington) which did not appeal to me, I decided to start looking at nurseries which were on route to work (in Hackney) as I worked for Hackney Council, it is then that I discovered Fernbank. After making a call to Fernbank & having a warm

conversation with the Administrator I quickly arranged to visit Fernbank for a viewing. On our visit to Fernbank my son & I were met with such warmth & attention to detail from not only the room staff but also from those who appeared to work in the office. Having visited many nurseries previously this is not something that we had experienced, during the visit the room staff interacted with my son & I noticed how comfortable he was made to feel, it was then that I knew that Fernbank was the nursery for us! The outdoor area at Fernbank was a bonus as it seemed to be one of the best outdoor areas I had seen! There was never any question as to where my other children would attend, it would always be Fernbank, even with Covid & working from home I still opted to send my last child to Fernbank, as I knew that being a victim of lockdown he would receive the love care & attention that he required.

I have had 4 children at Fernbank from 2008 - 2022, staff at Fernbank are more than just staff, they become members of extended families, they are always supportive & there for advice when needed. I can honestly say that I can not take full responsibility/credit for the amazing individuals my children have become as staff at Fernbank played a big part in raising my children.

Although my children are now all in school, I was devastated to hear that there are yet again plans to close Fernbank. I was part of the 1st campaign to save Fernbank & Hillside and can not believe we are here again. Finding affordable child care is paramount to families, especially as we are in the middle of a cost of living crisis, affordable child care is something that Fernbank offers. Although my family no longer attends Fernbank, I will assist those trying to save it. We were successful last year & I pray we are successful again!

X (parent of a child at Fernbank):

As a first time parent Fernbank has provided me with the assurance and care that I was looking for in a nursery. The highly experienced staff and their tenure at the nursery is unique and provides for a warm and familial environment. It is such a leaned on local resource for childcare it is unfathomable the council now wishes to close it. It is apparent via other testimonials how highly regarded it is, and I think it such a waste of opportunity that over the last 3 years, the council has focused its efforts on effecting its closure rather than considering a real viable business plan to keep the centre running. Needless to say for those on limited income Fernbank is a lifesaver, but also for those parents like me on the top band income. Working 5 days a week, even as a high fee earner, I am left with little money at the end of the month. Other nurseries would see me in a monthly deficit after outgoings. Fernbank has provided the opportunity for me as a new mother to continue to work and live in Hackney and in turn invest back into the borough, and I am truly grateful to Fernbank for that. As said, the fact that the council has provided 6 months notice for Fernbank and other centres to source substantial funding, rather than put a notice out for investment 3 years ago is acting in such bad faith and not in the interests of Hackney families. I really hope that a solution is found to keep such a diverse and caring nursery like Fernbank open so that families may continue to benefit from what it has to offer, and keep mums like me in the workplace and not priced out of Hackney.

X and X (parents of a child at Sebright):

We were so fortunate to find Sebright Children's Centre and eventually get a place there for our oldest daughter when she was 2 (now 7 years old).

Before that she went to a community college nursery. We could not afford any other childcare options in the area and still at that point considered ourselves lucky. But being linked to a community college meant that one of us could not go back to full time employment, as we had no way of managing childcare during holidays prior to getting a spot at Sebright.

Getting a place at Sebright was a true blessing! We could afford the fees and not worry about 14 weeks of school holidays without any cover. But beyond that the staff members have always been loving, caring, understanding and accommodating to us.

Our younger daughter was born in 2020. After our experience with our first child, we only wanted our daughter to go to a Council run nursery. Due to Covid we had to move around for the first 1.5 years of her life, but we were moved back to the area in 2022. We immediately contacted Sebright, and they were able to allocate a place for our younger daughter. It was very well worth the wait! We felt as if we never left. Practically all the staff members were still there four years later. It was just amazing to see so many familiar faces and know that the staff are happy to work and stay at our lovely Sebright.

The council's decision to close the centre is devastating, unfair and short sighted. We are hoping to do whatever we can to overturn it!

X (parent of a child at Sebright):

I visited a lot of local nurseries in my area while looking for one for my son and nowhere has been as warm and welcoming as at the Sebright Centre. We were on the waiting list for months, but in all honesty, this was the only place I wanted my son to go. When my son got a place, we were delighted and our experience so far has been such a beautiful and joyful story.

It's a beautiful and joyful story every day as I drop off my son and pick him up. We're welcomed with the biggest smiles at Reception, followed by the warmest welcome by the nursery staff. They always have kind words for the kids and always take the time to talk to the parents. They know the kids well and they look after them with precision, attention and a lot of tenderness. The quality of their care is of a very high standard and they do it with a dedication that I admire so much.

Not only do we feel loved at Sebright, but we feel safe. I know that my son is happy and in good hands, and I can see that in his eyes at the end of each day spent at the nursery.

The Sebright Centre contributes massively to the personal balance of my family life. Raising a kid in London is hard and can feel lonely. Thanks to the Sebright Centre, I feel supported by the staff and also by the community of parents that I speak to every day. I can't imagine my everyday life and the ones of families around me with the Sebright Centre. It would be a

massive loss and I'm convinced it would have a huge impact on the balance and health of the kids and their parents.

Why close a centre such as Sebright that has become a vital social and educational pillar for a whole community?

I urge you to reconsider this decision and keep the Centre open. My son and all the other kids deserve a high-quality education just like the one they're getting now.

They all deserve that we invest in their future.

X and X (parents with a child at Sebright):

Our 10 year old son attended Sebright Children's Centre from the age of 1 until reception. He loved his time at the centre and we only have good memories.

Fast forward 7 years and we were back at Sebright to put our daughter's name on a waiting list. It was so reassuring to learn that most of the staff members still work at Sebright today and we would be leaving our daughter in the hands of dedicated carers we know and trust. It made the return to work much easier.

While Sebright feels the same, we witnessed many improvements over the years, particularly in the expanded range of community services now offered which benefits the wider community.

It is truly heartbreaking to think that our children's centre faces potential closure and families face the ordeal of finding alternative care for their children.

X (parent with child at Sebright):

I first went to Sebright Childrens' centre when my son (now 9) was just a few weeks old in February or March 2014.

The centre offered sessions for babies (including newborns) where you could go, sit in a lovely, colourful, calm environment, meet other mums but also focus on your baby, and learn about what they needed.

The subjects of the sessions varied but included sessions on introducing solid foods, music with Corin, making footprints and handprints and plenty of time to talk, feed your baby in a comfortable feeding chair and explore sensory toys/lights and lots of books.

I was given a book to keep milestones and memories relating to developmental progress with a photo of Woody on it and his name, and made to feel welcome, cared for, and that I had somewhere to go and be with my baby that was free and that was outside our flat.

Over the years that followed Sebright Childrens' Centre opened up to me many opportunities for me and my children, which ranged from becoming interested in music (Corin was so great with my sons that we hardly missed a weekly session for the next 5 years whether he was at Sebright or Comet Childrens' Centre) to cooking more healthily after we attended Sebright cooking courses, trying our exercise outside in the park with a coach and a group of other mums and, perhaps most importantly for me downstairs, being able to explore the stay and play sessions, messy play sessions, and even baby yoga.

For me I have no doubt that being able to go to these things made a huge impact on me being able to stay happy and cope with my two young children and avoid post-natal depression and much anxiety caused by lack of space/facilities that I could provide them in our home.

I am aware that these sessions supported many other parents too, lots of who were vulnerable and in need in lots of different ways. It provided a place where everyone was welcome and could feel that their children were part of a loving, caring community, and also where we could enjoy our children and meeting each other.

I continued going to Sebright at Stay and Plays until my son could start in Red Room in the nursery part time, and then used to go when I wasn't working part time with him, and my second son, born in 2017 (who also went to nursery at Seabright).

We loved the nursery staff straight away and how caring they were to our children and all of the children. They seemed to really enjoy being with the babies and each other, you could tell straight away that they had worked together a long time and knew and supported each other well. They worked as a team and as my son said recently, as they got older 'it was like a cross between home and school' at nursery, with learning and development important but also a cosy and comfortable environment that made having to collect them in the winter at 5.30 after a long day at work less painful.

They supported families who were going through difficulties as well (who were referred to the centre for childcare) and I saw children really grow and be happy in the environment. Lockdown was a really difficult time for a lot of us but Sebright was there for me when as a key worker I had to go to work in the Borough Emergency Control Centre and it meant that our son could continue to go to nursery and make relationships and learn outside of our home.

So many of my friends and my families' friends come from Sebright, and I want the excellent staff there to be able to keep working there and doing amazing work with families and children.

I really feel that investment in early years and under 5s both in terms of children's learning but also in terms of their community cohesion cannot be underestimated and want other families to be able to be part of Sebright for many years to come.

X and X (parents of children at Sebright nursery):

Sebright Children's Centre has been a vital part of our lives since our twins were just 3 weeks old.

We visited the centre every week for health visitor appointments due to one twin being incredibly unwell. I felt safe and supported by staff right from the start at an extremely difficult time. Now, almost 3 years later I reminisce with Betty about how tiny they were then and how they've turned into energetic, crazy toddlers.

Sebright Nursery saved us when the boys turned 1. We were suddenly without childcare after being severely let down by another nursery 24 hours before my return to work after maternity leave. Susan showed us around at short notice and managed to find space for us almost immediately that ensured I was able to return to work.

The boys have been in each nursery room, thriving more and more each day from the education, love and support shown by the staff here.

We have built connections here right from the start and the sense of community is undeniable. To lose such a pivotal part of the community would be devastating.

X (parent of child at Sebright):

If you can believe it, I myself was born locally just over 40 years ago and attended Sebright primary school along with my siblings. When I had my first daughter, I was a nanny and fortunately never needed childcare... quite a few years later and now a primary school teacher I no longer have the comfort of taking my second baby to work. Sebright children's centre for many years was in the backdrop to our uncertain life. When my oldest began Haggerston school over the road, Sebright children's centre was her first choice in gaining knowledge and skills from the early years staff for her Duke of Edinburgh volunteering. Eventually they became my child's first set of caregivers away from home in 2022, the centre was affordable for myself especially compared to the cost of other providers. Sebright children's centre is not just a childcare solution, they are a loving, caring group of people who go out of their way to ensure the peace of mind we all need to maintain the day-to-day duty of work. Sebright children's centre has also scaffolded the SEN procedure and supported me in my role as a mother not a teacher in understanding how best to support my muffin moving forward. She is an amazing little person who may not be able to say it (yet), but going to Sebright children's centre for nearly two years and fully being able to explore in her local familiar environment of Haggerston Park area better her understanding and makes her so happy. Hearing the news of possible closure was overwhelming, as for a lot of the children and babies at Sebright unlike others, they were born during such isolated times of covid the centre means that little be more.

X & X (Sebright parents):

The decision to put our child into nursery was a difficult one for us as she was only just turning 6 months old, but it was necessary in order for Mum to return to work. The private nurseries in the area were either unaffordable for us, or wouldn't accept children so young, and the other Council subsidised nurseries close by were fully booked with long waiting lists. Luckily, at the last moment, a space opened up in the baby room at Sebright and for this we will be forever thankful.

At first we worried that our child might have difficulty settling, especially with all the uncertainty surrounding Covid lockdowns. Thankfully she settled straight away and hasn't looked back since. From our first visit it was clear what a warm and safe environment has been created at Sebright. The staff and carers have been so welcoming, nurturing and professional, we couldn't have asked for more. Under their care our child has developed into a smart, happy and confident little girl who is excited every day to be dropped off at the centre.

As a small family, living away from home, the stability and sense of community Sebright has given us has been such a positive in our lives. The great location set in the green surrounds of Haggerston Park is one of the things we really appreciate, living as we do on a busy road with lots of traffic. It's so important to us for our child and all the children to be able to take trips to the Hackney farm, The Forest School and the green fields surrounding the Nursery without even leaving the park, not to mention the hours spent in the new playground with all her friends and their parents and carers.

We honestly don't know what we'd do without Sebright and would be devastated for other children not to be able to benefit, as we have, from the dedication of its staff and all the wonderful services it has to offer families in the community.

X and X (Sebright parents):

The news that the future of Sebright Children's Centre is in doubt is troubling. My son attends a couple of days a week. The nursery has been crucial to his development over the last three years. Not to mention the close relationships he has cultivated with the staff and other children, the benefits of having social interaction with people outside of the home. The benefits to us, his parents, to be able to entrust him to the care of the wonderful nursery staff so that we may continue to work.

Access to childcare allows parents to remain economically active. Is it cheaper in the short term for the state to support an adult who is unable to work than to subsidise their childcare? No access to childcare is a disincentive to having children. This feeds into the longer term demographic problem of an ageing population and all its associated challenges.

Sebright Children's Centre is a crucial cog in the local infrastructure. Closing it would be detrimental to the local community and economy. Investing in and supporting it will have benefits which far outweigh the costs.

It can't be overstated, investing in children now will yield exponential returns for us all in the future.

X (Sebright parent):

Choosing a nursery place for a child is a difficult decision to make. Having visited many nurseries stepping into Sebright made the difference and made the decision easy. I instantly knew that my daughter would be looked after in a safe, nurturing and caring environment. Entering the building feels like a warm hug. The staff are all so warm and generous and genuinely care for the children and are experts at what they do.

It is so important to be able to provide affordable childcare provision and Sebright has been able to do this. As it is means-tested it allows all children to access the same care and opportunities. We are hugely saddened and disappointed that this wonderful place is under threat.

My family has accessed the centre from birth to starting school. I have attended stay and plays with both my children and my daughter attended the nursery for two years leaving to attend school. We have had health visitor meetings at the centre and as a parent I have felt fully supported by the services they have offered and provided me. The stay and play activities are varied, imaginative, thoughtful, brilliantly staffed and well attended. It would be a travesty if this provision and the opportunities these provide were lost to children and parents.

Sebright is a vital provider for the critical early formative years and has given both my children a hugely important foundation in their childhood which will serve them both throughout their lives. I hope other children will be able to have the same opportunities they have had at a thriving Sebright Children's Centre.

X & X (Sebright parents):

Our son is now 3 1/2 and started Sebright at 11 months. He was born during Covid and being a first time Mum was a daunting prospect at the time. When restrictions were lifted we used the centre's baby groups and I instantly felt welcomed and supported by the staff, something I didn't experience at private baby groups.

Moving forward 6 months and looking for a nursery place for our son, Sebright was our first choice.

He settled in straight away I believe that was very much down to the staff's experience, care and warmth.

Sebright made it possible for me to go back to work and has created a safe space for my son to flourish. Something I can't thank the Sebright children's centre and staff enough for.

X and X (Sebright parents):

We first came across Sebright through the Children centre provision. Our eldest daughter being born 3 months ahead of the pandemic and my workplace going bust just a month before the first lockdown, I (the mother) had been her main carer since birth.

Knowing little to no other parents back then, I was grateful for the stay&play sessions which offered much welcome practical and mental health support as well as social interactions for myself and my baby.

Our daughter, now aged 4 years, was offered a place at Sebright nursery at 14 months old. She started alongside her 'first' friend whom she met at stay&play and they remain inseparable to this day.

Having access to affordable yet qualitative childcare in the borough meant I (the mother) could focus on my job search while knowing my daughter was in the best hands. We were subsequently offered a place for our youngest at 10 months (now 14) - which not only gave us a sense of continuity but the opportunity for them to spend as much time as possible together.

Both our children are thriving at Sebright. Staff have been an essential part of their development, growth and self confidence. Across all rooms, we've had only the most amazing experience. The level of care, kindness and professionalism demonstrated by all staff across the board is unprecedented.

Sebright quickly became a pillar in our family life. Being away from any relatives, the close knit community fostered by nursery has provided us with great support and reassurance over the years. Fast forward 3 years, the friends and support network we've established thanks to Sebright are paramount in both our lives and that of our children.

The threat of closure to Sebright is nerve-racking and utterly upsetting. We strongly oppose it and support the campaign to save it with all our hearts.

X and X (Sebright parents):

Securing a place for our child at Sebright was an amazing stroke of luck that I will always be grateful for. When I put her name on the list, only because some other mums I was with did,

little did I know what a wonderful place it was. Another unexpected factor was that when she finally started there 10 months later we were in the middle of a pandemic. Yet, even during this incredibly difficult time, the staff at Sebright did an unbelievable job. Our settling-in week demonstrated that this was going to be a safe and comforting place for our child with an incredible team - many with years of experience - fostering a genuine sense of family and community.

During those initial six months of restrictions, the service they provided was nothing short of remarkable. They worked so hard to stay open, offering vital support to working parents like myself. And for that, I'll always be grateful.

Now, the future of this incredible centre hangs in the balance, offering not just childcare, but essential support and affordable care for young families in our community. Its closure would be a devastating loss. That's why I'm campaigning to save it. Together, let's keep our beloved Sebright safe from closure.

X (Sebright parent):

I came across Sebrights Children Centre in 2018 when my first daughter was born and I was wondering what child care provider would be best when I went back to work. We had a really bad experience with another nursery, privately operated, and after I decided I did not want her to go there.

Incredibly upset I went to Sebrights and explained what had happened. They could not have been kinder or more caring and somehow found a place for my daughter to start within in the month. Not only is it a place we can actually afford but the staff treat you like family. Myself, my partner, my mother, my sister and my elder daughter who used to go are all treated like long lost friends when we visit. The low turnover of staff speaks volumes about the kind of place it is to work and be a part of.

By closing down this place, we will end up forcing families to go to the kind of private nurseries I had such a bad experience with in the first place, and those will be the lucky ones who might have financial assistance like I did. I imagine for a large percentage of others, child care at a nursery will be removed from the table as a viable option.

X & X (Sebright parents):

Sebright children centre and nursery has been a key pillar for our family since our son was born. Initially I was very grateful having such a magnificent centre nearby when on maternity leave, feeling connected to a wider network of parents and carers. The weekly offer ranging from lively music hour, stay & play as well as health visitor support, was such an immense help which I would not want to have missed.

When we received the offer of being able to send our little boy to day care at Sebright, it was a such a great relief for us, having heard only good things about staff in advance from other parents, as well as having met very kind and welcoming people at the centre beforehand. At first it can be quite daunting sending little ones off on day care, Sebright nursery has given us the confidence and support we needed. From the very first day, our little son was very warmly received and taken care off, he is very much enjoying going to nursery to spend time with his lovely carers and friends.

Having been given a more affordable childcare option was and is very helpful to us, as many private childcare providers are simply overpriced. A facility such as Sebright is an essential and vital asset to young families like ourselves, forming a key pillar for the neighbourhood. Places like this help to foster a healthy and lively community, it would be a devastating loss to see Sebright Centre shut its doors due to an ill informed and short sighted decision of the council trying to close such a key facility. We strongly oppose a potential planned closure and will support any efforts made to keep Sebright Centre open.

X and X (former parents at Sebright):

Despite living less than a quarter of a mile from Sebright Children's Centre, so high is the demand for spaces at the nursery that we had to wait until our oldest child was two and a half before a space became available. She had previously attended a private nursery over a mile away because this was the only nursery place we could secure. Being offered a place at Sebright, so close to home, made our lives considerably easier. Our daughter loved her time at Sebright. The small class size enabled her to make several friends whom she remains close to today, five years after she has left the Centre. As parents we particularly enjoyed the continuity of staff Sebright provides, something that had been lacking at our private nursery– it is always so much easier to drop off an anxious child in the morning when they have familiar faces there to welcome them with open arms and a big cuddle.

Our second child was able to start at Sebright when she turned one because of the Centre's policy of giving preference to siblings. With the fees being means tested, we were able to afford to have two children under three in the nursery, while we both worked as parents, something that we would not have been able to do in a private nursery.

Our third child suffered with separation anxiety and Sebright Children's Centre gave him additional care to help him settle and separate from us each day. When he was three years old he was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. The Children's Centre quickly sent staff on training courses to enable him to return into their care within two weeks of discharge from hospital. Were it not to have been for the staff at Sebright Children's Centre, and their willingness to meet our child's additional needs, one of us would have had to give up work. Thank you Sebright Children's Centre, for looking after all 3 of our children. You will always be in their hearts.

X and X (Sebright parents):

We first visited Sebright Children's Centre when our son was 4 days old. It was our first time venturing outside after coming home from the hospital, to go to a breastfeeding drop-in, which we ended up attending for at least once a month from that day, for a whole year.

Looking back, that visit was a lifeline. We were deep in the haze and anxiety of new parenthood, but from our very first interaction with Betty at reception and the subsequent visits to the centre for play activities and breastfeeding drop-ins, everything we saw of Sebright was positive and heartwarming and we knew we wanted our little boy to go to nursery here.

Finding quality and affordable childcare is so difficult that I (Mum) actually went back to work without having a childcare provision in place. After a terrible experience with a private provider and over a year on the waiting list for Sebright, we were overjoyed to eventually be offered a place - not only because it was an option that was more affordable for us, but also because every person we encountered at the centre was warm, kind and reassuring.

From the first week of settling in, Rita and the red room team have been amazing. Our happy, friendly and curious boy loves going to nursery, which is a testament to the love and care he gets there. Every morning when we drop him off, we leave feeling confident and grateful that our son is in the best hands.

The council's plan to close the centre is heartbreaking, not only for the loss of the nursery but also for the loss of such a vital service to the community, the impact of which will affect people's mental health, professional prospects and overall sense of wellbeing. The option of the centre being taken over by another provider is just as bad. Hackney is in no way at a loss for expensive privately run nurseries that don't give anything back to the community, there's more than enough of those already. Affordable, quality childcare on the other hand is difficult to find so we wholeheartedly oppose the council's short sighted and ill considered decision, and will do whatever we can to help the campaign to stop the closure!

X (former parent at Sebright):

Sebright is a hugely important place for our family.

Our eldest son (now 12) was there from the age of 11 months until the age of 4.

Our youngest son, now 8, was in Sebright from the age of 7 months until 4 years old.

The care that both of our kids received in Sebright was phenomenal, and it has marked both of our boys' relationship with organised education in the most positive way. Both of them grieved having to say goodbye to their teachers at Sebright.

Having access to affordable childcare in our local area, as was the case with Sebright, meant that I (the mother) could afford to go back to work, something that was important for my mental health and for my professional development.

Furthermore, the day centre was a life saver for me during my maternity leave. The sense of community that was available there (for the kids and for myself) during my maternity leave, was essential for my maternal wellbeing and for healthy development of our kids' social skills. We all still have friends and support networks that we have met during our time in Sebright.

Community spaces like Sebright, as well as affordable childcare at such an excellent level are absolutely essential for our local area.

Closing down Sebright is a huge mistake. It is essential for the wellbeing of our local community and the professional development of local parents.

I urgently urge you to reconsider your decision to close down Sebright and to keep this important local institution alive.

X (Sebright parent):

We have a child at the nursery and have been overwhelmed by the friendliness and caring nature of the staff and the family atmosphere of the centre. Our daughter has been cared for by all the staff with such kindness, and with specific attention to her development, personality and wellbeing. It feels like a second home. We are full of sadness that the nursery and centre overall may close as we feel that it is vital that high quality care remains for children from all social and economic backgrounds, something lacking in the borough.

X and X (Sebright parents):

Sebright Children's Centre became part of our lives soon after our twin daughters were born. Two weeks after their birth we were lucky to have been given places at the baby massage course led by Itadal. This was a brilliant course that gave us invaluable support in those early days and it was a great way to meet other parents. Shortly afterwards we started attending regular breast feeding appointments with Lorraine, which were essential to support us with breast feeding our twins. It is amazing how instrumental all these services were to give us confidence as parents and also to give us a sense of community in those early weeks. Soon we were going to the centre several times a week for various reasons: health visitor appointments, adult-learning Henry workshop led by Nivi, the Christmas parties with Moses as father Christmas, various stay-and-play sessions, music with Corin, always with a warm welcome from Betty and Mary. We were part of that community, it was like our second home.

We registered our interest at several nurseries near us as soon as we could. Sebright, of course, was amongst our choices. We knew how hard it would be to secure places for twins in a

nursery, particularly one we could afford, and we both wanted to return to work. We were very grateful that we were given part-time places at Sebright.

Two years on and we continue to have only great things to say about Sebright. The everyday care our daughters receive from their Early Years educators is phenomenal. Simone, Rita, Nicky, Rushba, Abi, they all have an impressive record of years of experience working with children and their families, and you can tell. They show they care and they have the experience to back it. Our daughters love them and they love their little friends as well.

It was a great shock to learn the children's centre and nursery might be closing. This seems careless and short-sighted. This feels utterly wrong. Hackney families need places like Sebright to foster a sense of community, to support them in their early years of parenthood. Hackney parents need affordable nurseries to allow them to go back to work. Sebright is central to our lives. It is a warm, welcoming, diverse, caring environment. We strongly oppose these proposals.

X and X (Sebright parents):

Our daughter moved to Sebright in the summer of 2022, when she was two and a half. She had previously attended a private nursery. This nursery was taken over by new providers a few months into our child's time there. There was a rapid deterioration in the quality of care they offered. This included safeguarding issues. We saw a huge churn in staff, as new, inexperienced employees joined, only to leave after a handful of weeks. Its costs were high and continued to rise, which threatened our ability to both return to work. There has never been a day since she started at Sebright that we have regretted her being there.

At Sebright she is safe and happy. She loves learning and is encouraged and supported in this. She is cared for by teachers who we know have worked in the same place for many years. This makes an inconceivably big difference. We value the stability this brings, but also the wealth of experience and knowledge each staff member possesses. All of this would disappear if Sebright were to be closed. It would be such a loss to the local community.

Alongside that, it is one of the most friendly, welcoming places we have ever set foot in. Everybody there knows our daughter's name. Everybody there greets you with a smile. You only need to spend five minutes at Sebright to know how important a role it plays in the lives of hundreds of people in Hackney, just as it plays such an important role in the life of our family.

X, Hillside parent:

Our son started at Hillside at 11 months old, and as first-time parents we were pretty clueless about a lot of things. It was only thanks to the staff's stellar caregiving that we worked out he had a dairy intolerance, and as we didn't have much in terms of a support network, it was invaluable to us that we could count on the expertise and love of all caregivers, be it with minor

illnesses, major milestones, and everything in between. I am so grateful that our child could spend his early years in such a loving and supportive environment, where everyone's differences are celebrated, curiosity is nurtured, and kindness is the golden rule.

Many staff have been at Hillside for a number of years, and that is a testament to their dedication and investment in the centre. You could tell that everyone cares deeply about each child no matter what, and that this is not just a job for them, it's a vocation. I loved hearing Marva's stories of full-grown adults saying hello to her and thanking her for caring for them as babies, and I really hope our son will be able to do the same one day.

I could never have afforded to go back to work if it wasn't for Hillside and their reasonable childcare fees. This was a lifesaver for me, and the best possible start to our child's social life we could hope for. Looking back I am glad that we couldn't afford the posh nurseries, as this would have probably been depressingly homogeneous and not at all what we love best about Hackney!

X (parent of child who formerly attended Hillside):

Hillside Children's Centre is an indispensable childcare resource in Hackney. The level of care offered and accessibility because of long opening hours and affordable fees must continue. Our son attended from the age of 11 months until he started primary school in September 2022. We found the centre and people working there to be warm, caring and passionate caregivers. They consistently offered excellent childcare support that we could not have done without. The long daily opening hours and affordable fees and location allowed us both to continue to work whilst our child attended Hillside. This would not have been possible without Hillside. We can attest to the importance of Hillside and other centres like it in supporting ordinary people striving to live their lives in the borough.

We feel that the learning support that our child received at Hillside was well structured and diligently applied within the setting. This gave our son an excellent start in his education and a firm grounding from which to transition to primary school.

It was such a proud moment for us when our son graduated from Hillside. We were able to share that moment with his peers, other parents and the staff at the centre and reflect upon his time at Hillside as well as the importance of the setting for so many people in the community. We strongly support Hillside, Fernbank and Sebright Children's Centres and urge Hackney council to keep these centres open so that they can continue to offer affordable, accessible childcare in Hackney. Thank you.

X (Sebright parent):

Back in 2009 when I had my eldest daughter, now aged 15, I was attending weekly classes and when she was about 6 months I became stuck for childcare but once speaking with my health

visitor and expressing how I wouldn't be able to attend my classes anymore he was able to get me into a 3hr drop off session once a week so I could attend these. Once she was regularly attending I was then offered a space in the baby room. 2 years later my second eldest was born and due to having sibling preference she was also offered a place at Sebright. Both my eldest daughters attended Sebright until they went to Primary school.

I then had my son in 2016 and applied straight away hoping to get a space. It took nearly a year as I no longer had any other child in the nursery but eventually got a space and he also attended Sebright until Primary school.

Sebright has also been the place I attend when my children needed to have their development reviews and my son who needed speech therapy so it has always been somewhere I've been to for many years and what I liked about it the most was that the staff turnaround was minimal as fast forward to 2023 my youngest finally got her place in the blue room after being on the waiting list for nearly 2 years and all the nursery staff were still there including the general staff like Moses, Betty, Mary, Victoria and Juliet.

My youngest was in a private nursery whose staff turnaround was ridiculous and they were not extremely professional or welcoming once you had signed the contract. The fees were extortionate at £95 a day and the rules and policies they had were made up by the day when you challenged everything. Imagine having to pay for 8 days in a month (2 days a week) and them having staff training on 4 of your days but you still had to pay for it! Then closing for 2 weeks in the Summer and you still having to pay for it! Them closing when schools did for Xmas and you still having to pay for all those days they are also closed and you having to find alternative childcare because you still have to work! With Sebright you were given everything from the beginning and explained everything by Susan and I don't know if I would have honestly been able to continue working if she remained at the private nursery.

Both my youngest children have needed speech therapy and having Flavia as a Senco lead for over 10 years is reassuring as she is experienced in what she does and has helped with their development.

My daughter who attends now also has the same key worker my son had when he was there so we also have a good relationship as she has known me for over 7yrs.

My son actually said he wanted to go back to nursery as he missed it.

Closing the centre would be a great loss to Hackney parents like myself who has used this centre for various things like development reviews, baby classes, speech and language therapy, breast feeding classes, stay and play and childcare over the past 15 years.

X and X (Sebright parents):

I wanted to write a few lines to explain how important Sebright nursery is to the local community. It is an invaluable resource providing advice, classes, and looking after our local children in a safe, nurturing space for learning, play and exploration.

Please reconsider the closure!

X & X - Parents with children at Fernbank Nursery:

When I visited Fernbank I immediately knew that I wanted my boys to attend there, and this is even before I had viewed any other nurseries. The centre has such a welcoming atmosphere and is very 'homely' - this wouldn't be the case if it didn't have such amazing staff. We also had the pleasure of attending their stay and play groups before they started the nursery and continued to attend when they were initially part time.

My older son has been in all three classes and I can confidently say that all of the staff are great. Fernbank is like a family, there is a genuine connection between the staff and the children - my boys run to the office nearly every morning to say hello to Laura, Ora and Pursha before going into the classroom and receiving a warm greeting from the teachers, who are all very dedicated and passionate.

The nursery has great facilities, in particular the large outdoor space that includes a forest garden, which is a luxury for many nurseries. The children also get taken out quite a bit to local parks, as well as shops. My youngest has been to a pet shop where they got to see the animals which he loved and also the local corner shop where he got to choose some fruit and pay the cashier.

The diversity of cultures within the nursery amongst the children and staff is something that should definitely be celebrated and it played a significant part in why I chose the nursery. The education that they receive is extremely good - I regularly see my boys come home with new pieces of knowledge, the most recent being Chinese New Year.

The low staff turnover and the longevity of the majority of the staff says a lot about the type of environment is. Many of them have been there over a decade and some over 20 years. This speaks volumes about the dedication and experience of the staff. It's also extremely positive for the children in terms of stability. I think it would be very hard to find a nursery that has such a low turnover.

Fernbank has been a lifesaver! It is an incredible nursery for my boys and all of the children that attend. It's devastating to think that we might lose such an amazing and positive setting for them that is affordable. Do not close any of the Children's Centres!!!

X and X (Sebright parents):

After our child was born, we were in Spain as our family network could support us and make things easier for us to be able to work. After several months of waiting, we received an email from Sebright. Finally, we could take our child to daycare!

We were still scared because of the pandemic, but the atmosphere at Sebright immediately reassured us that our little one was safe and well cared for. Thanks to that, we could return to London and be able to work without worrying about her well-being.

At the daycare, they not only took care of our child but also played a crucial role in getting to know more parents and forging relationships with many people in the neighbourhood. Now that we are considering looking for another home, we cannot imagine moving away from here, where our daughter and we have found all our friends.

The closure of the centre is not only a problem for the children and their parents but also comes with layoffs and a lack of much-needed attention for future parents in the area. This patch in the council economy won't be a solution in the long run.

X & X (Fernbank parents):

After a difficult time trying to find a nursery due to waiting lists, prohibitive expensive, or poor options we were incredibly lucky that Fernbank started accepting children again in 2021 so we signed up our son straight away and he started when he was ~10 months old.

The centre is staffed by people who clearly care deeply about the children, their development and well being. We were worried if we were doing the best thing for our son at first but this feeling quickly disappeared as he flourished in the environment.

He loves the large outdoor space which is a scarcity for nurseries in Hackney.

The consistency of the staffing has also benefited his confidence, and I'm very aware that private nurseries rarely manage to provide this.

It's impossible not to realise the tremendous benefit Fernbank provides the community seeing how well he and his friends have developed in the last 2 years. I cannot believe that closing this nursery or others will improve Hackney's balance sheet long term, or improve the lives of its constituents. It will simply be a loss that will be more expensive to replace in the long run, and will push financial and social costs onto later years.

X (Sebright parent):

It's difficult to say how much I have relied on, and how much my family have benefitted from the support my child and I have received from the amazing staff and provision at Sebright. I remember going into Sebright Children's Centre for the first time on a really hot day for "singing with Corin". Having somewhere to be able to get out of our flat on a hot day, with a small baby,

sleep deprived and struggling with post-natal depression was a huge blessing. The friendly welcome from Mary as soon as we walked in, and the other staff in the centre made it feel like a safe place and although at the time I was struggling with leaving our flat on most days, I began taking our then baby to stay and plays at Sebright. Through this I found out that there was nursery provision upstairs and when I applied I couldn't believe we had got a place. I had tried to get a place at other nurseries including Ann Taylor and been told we wouldn't get a place. I didn't know about Sebright's nursery provision until a member of staff mentioned it.

If our child hadn't been given a place at Sebright my salary wouldn't have been as much as the childcare and therefore I wouldn't have been able to justify going back to work. Having the additional provision on site at Sebright, in the same place as the nursery is really important. For example on more than one occasion our health visitor arriving for her clinic there spotted me and my child arriving at nursery. When she spotted us she insisted we come into the surgery for appointments with her. I had found it so difficult trying to get an appointment through the GP surgery with her that I had given up as it just seemed too difficult. It was through this process that the health visitor referred our child to speech therapy, which has done wonders for him and also for assessment with the social communication clinic.

The staff at Sebright are all amazing, Betty, Mary, Heena, Rita, Sam, Simone, Susan, Juliet everyone. They have looked after our child in the nursery since he was 9 months old and throughout that time he has nearly always had the same key worker. The staff who my child rightly calls "his teachers", which is of course exactly what they are, are hard working, loving, reliable and genuine experts at what they do. They have many many years of experience. They might not be as good at self promotion as some other providers but they really do do an amazing job and stop families falling through the cracks. They have helped our family so much and I really hope that other families in the future are able to benefit from their expertise and care.

X (teacher) X (GP) parents of a child who used to attend Fernbank:

Our search for a nursery for our daughter started with a panic. We put our daughter on a wait list for Comberton and the local children's centres at 12 weeks old, at 9 months we were told she was still on a wait list and there was no guarantee that she would be offered a place at 12 months when Jane's maternity leave ended. Luckily through word of mouth we heard about Fernbank and were relieved when they had a place. Once there our daughter experienced the most incredible loving, varied and stimulated care. We picked her up each day and she was full of excitement about the things she had done. Whenever we walked into Fernbank the love, dedication and expertise of all the staff was clear to see. We have recently moved to Manchester. Here there is nothing like Fernbank, parents' only option is private nurseries which are incredibly expensive and as a result do not reflect the communities they should serve. Hackney should be proud of its nursery care provision and should protect it.

X & X, parents of a child at Fernbank CC:

Our child started full-time at Fernbank aged 11 months, we struggled to find good quality childminders and private nurseries in the area were unaffordable for us. Our child has really thrived with Fernbank providing him a secure social environment through Covid, and now preparing him for a smooth transition into school reception. Our child is particularly enjoying Fernbank's fantastic phonics programme, which we know other private nurseries don't provide.

We have also seen Fernbank grow as a community in this time, beating the threat of closure and now running at full capacity with a close knit group of staff and parents. The closure would have an irreversible and terrible impact on this thriving community. The staff at Fernbank are so caring of all the parents and children, teaching cultural diversity, helping with special needs and trained in specific health areas. We want to particularly thank Joe (our son's key person almost since he started nursery), who gives us unconditional support and care every single day, helping us when we have questions regarding our son's development. Fernbank benefits from a stable and mutually supportive staff team which we know just does not happen under private provision in London. The nursery also has a wide ranging and highly nutritious menu!

Fernbank provides a stable environment.

Fernbank cares for their parents & children.

Fernbank celebrates cultures.

Fernbank prepares children for school.

Fernbank builds community.

X, parent of a child at Fernbank:

Following a redundancy, at the same time that our daughter was born, my partner chose to start his own business. And it is only due to access to a means-tested, affordable community nursery that we have been able to navigate the uncertain time of starting a new business for him as I was able to afford full time childcare whilst I went back to work.

Beyond the direct financial assistance it provides to our family, Fernbank also provides a quality of care that cannot be matched by private nurseries. The long tenure of the staff is felt as soon as you walk in the door. They exude confidence, experience, care and tenderness. It is crazy that given the shortage in early years staff this cohort of loving, talented, highly experienced and knowledgeable staff are going to be let go and with them these very much needed skills will leave the borough.

We also chose Fernbank for the diversity of its children, parents and staff. This is highly important to us as a culturally mixed family and impossible to get in a private nursery in an ever more gentrified and segregated Hackney.

We are also planning for a second child and the threat of closure makes us anxious about how we are going to continue to afford childcare. We are heartbroken that even if we could afford a

private nursery, we would be paying more and our second child would still not receive the same quality of care.

It is also difficult to understand how the closure of three affordable community nurseries is being proposed in a Labour run council, at a time of a cost of living crisis and deepening poverty. The recently elected Mayor got elected on a ticket of anti-racism, economic justice and inclusivity. Affordable childcare is at the heart of all these issues.

X and X, parents of two children at Hillside:

Hillside gives our two children a childcare setting that has a combination of affordability, diversity and warmth which we simply could not find elsewhere within easy reach of home. It's a home from home for our kids, 4 and 1, and it gives them a grounding in everything that's brilliant about Hackney: people from all backgrounds and with different abilities, including SEND, learning together, playing together, working together. From the staff to the babies in the baby room to chef Andrew in the kitchen, it's a unique family. Don't ruin one of Hackney's best assets. Nurture it, like it nurtures our children.

X and X, parents of a child at Fernbank Nursery:

Our daughter joined Fernbank when she was one year old. When we were in search of a nursery place we visited Fernbank. It was at the end of Covid so visiting care settings become available again. As soon as we walked through nursery door we knew this was a good nurturing environment we wanted our daughter to be in. The Fernbank staff team have been so resilient and the nursery rebounded so quickly after first attempt to close the service. There is so many wonderful testimonies about staff team professionalism, caring nature and about the wealth of knowledge and expertise they have. All of that is lost when nursery will be closed.

Both my husband and I are consider ourselves as front line workers. We are working for local authority in central London in day service provision for vulnerable adults (people with learning disability and mental health). We are both in full time employment so we should be able to afford a childcare for our only child without any problem. The reality is that we break even at the end of each month. When we reflect back on time my daughter started nursery, we are 100% positive that we would not be able to afford a nursery fees with private early setting and remain in full time employment. The choice we would have to make would be between one of us working less days or me giving up my work.

We are on band 3 in nursery fee structure so possibly one level lower than NHS nurses (or the same band?) and one level lower than teachers giving that both parents working as nurses or teachers. I purposely emphasise this as lots of Hackney families who are also front line workers will struggle to afford a childcare in the future if council go ahead with closures! There is always lots of promises made by politicians and policy makers on local and national level to help or to support front line staff. All it feels like empty promises where there is no commitment to continue affordable childcare...

X, parent with a child at Fernbank:

My son joined Fernbank when he was three years old and I was finally able to get back to work. With free hours for three year olds this meant I could actually earn money rather than lose it all in nursery fees. It is a huge thing leaving your child for 8 hours a day but I could do that with absolute peace of mind that he was cared for, listened to and inspired.

The moment I stepped into Fernbank I knew it was the right place for my son, we were completely welcomed and it felt like a really joyful place to be. Then we saw the garden!. To have access to so much outside space in an inner city Nursery is incredible.

He absolutely loved his time there and was fully prepared for then joining reception class at Jubilee Primary School the following year. I fully believe that his time at Fernbank made the transition to primary school so easy and a really happy experience.

The staff at Fernbank work so hard and do so because they genuinely love their jobs, despite not being remunerated for it. So much effort goes into celebrations of all cultures and everyone's birthday is celebrated. The graduation event for the leavers was just amazing. They make sure every child feels included and full of confidence to step into the world.

It is beyond belief that closing these Nurseries down is even being considered. These places are part of the vital infrastructure Hackney needs in order for people to live here. Our community and our children need these Nurseries.