

The Always Growing Story

Who are we?

Always Growing are a group of three Early Years Education and Care settings in Berkshire, founded by directors Ben Bausor and Lewis Fogarty (us!). Across our sites in Windsor and Cippenham we have an incredible team of over 30 professionals who work alongside us, plus members of our own families, and over 120 children, learning and playing in our settings.

To guide our practice and teaching, Always Growing settings operate around our four pillars of pedagogy which we call our 4POP, which has been developed from a collection of Early Years and leadership research as well as our experiences in education:

- Reassuring relationships
- Clear communication
- Continuous curiosity
- Enabling environments

A combination of these pillars with the culture of growth at Always Growing makes for a wonderful place for children and team members to be.

As well as our 4-POP pedagogy, we work in what we call The Always Growing Way. We are a caring team and go above and beyond to support everyone in the Always Growing Community to be the best they can be.

So what does that look like in practice? Well, The Always Growing Way has been referred to by our team using to the following terms:

1. Putting the children first, always! This requires thinking outside the box and seeing the potential in all moments to extend children's thinking.
2. A big family, completely different to other nurseries, much more caring.
3. It is not about one approach that fits all, it is about what suits the children and the team, always in a state of wondering what we can do to help and be ambitious for all.
4. Promoting professional confidence and a coaching mindset
5. A culture of openness, inclusiveness and psychological safety

We hope that gives a little insight into how we work now, but all that wouldn't be possible without our history...

Where have we come from?

Back in 2009, we (Ben and Lewis) met by chance outside a Psychology lecture at Brunel University. Ben helped Lewis secure a work placement at The Windsor Boys' School (which we had actually both attended years before) and this led to us working our way up to running the SEN department together. In the meantime, we gained our Psychology Degrees and achieved Qualified Teacher Status.

Fast forward 6 years to January 2015 and Always Growing was born. *Well, the first version of it!*

What started as a Holiday Club in Windsor for 3 - 13-year-olds came from many conversations and a wealth of experience gained in Hungry Caterpillars, another wonderful provider of Early Years Education and Care. Lewis says he definitely learned from the best!

For several years Always Growing (the holiday club) was a wonderful way to fill our own school holiday time, but as this developed into an After School club and another Holiday Club in Slough, we began to realise we really enjoyed working with children and young people outside of the school setting, and that we were pretty good at it!!

We loved developing children and team members and were both still big children at heart too. So, around June 2018, we decided it was the right time for us to open a nursery. And we were ready for the challenge.

In January 2019, with the right people around us, a suitable location in the heart of Windsor and an opportunity to have the equipment from a local setting that was closing down, the stars aligned. The small group of parents from the setting were keen to keep their little ones together and they believed in the vision of Always Growing. We are eternally grateful to them that they trusted us and our team to make it happen.

Ups and downs

Despite the wonderful support, the beginning of our nursery journey was certainly a struggle and we had a steep learning curve to make our way up. We were, of course, doing our best but had to rely on our other services to provide cash flow.

Through hard work, we found our feet and employed some incredible people, many of whom still work with us today. We recognised that to help us move forward we needed staff with more experience of the early years sector to help us understand how we could develop the setting and provide the best learning opportunities. Employing the right people led to confidence and competence growth, so we could continue to look for further opportunities to build our services.

However, in March 2020 when COVID hit, it led to a bit of panic, then a pause, and then a series of pivots. Once we got over the shock, our focus had to very quickly move to sustaining what we had worked so hard to build over the past several years. We connected with our families and team members to reassure and support one another and are very proud of how we handled things during such a difficult time. We centred everything back to our 4POP, where relationships and communication was paramount.

In fact, using a combination of the furlough scheme, savings, and government support, we were able to not only survive this time but thrive too. We have continued to respond to challenges in the sector with positive and collaboration as central motivators, undoubtedly contributing to our continued growth.

Always Growing... and expanding!

In October 2020, following a successful competitive bid, we were awarded the opportunity to take on a Pre-School in Cippenham. This setting was previously led by a voluntary committee and we take our hats off to them! The work that goes into an Early Years setting is a huge ask for anyone, let alone a volunteer.

We have gone through a huge period of change at this site and were very proud to have our hard work and continued success there. We have had many positive visits from other professionals complimenting us on the changes we have made. We are very proud of the support we provide the children and families of Cippenham. We have also worked hard to ensure that families can attend the setting without a direct cost to them, through careful planning and efficient budgeting. We know that not all settings are in a position to do this, but we are glad that we can.

Then, in September 2021 we were given another opportunity, this time to take on a site in Maidenhead from a Primary School. However, this story had a slower, dustier, and sweatier start as we had to physically overhaul the environment! As a result of the huge investment of time and money (as well as the blood sweat and tears of a group of ex-students, family, and friends), the environment in that setting is so beautiful now, every ounce of effort was worth it.

For the next 18 months or so we focussed on reviewing and refining our processes across our three sites, to ensure sustainable and steady growth in our numbers across the board. This has meant our team has grown too and along with this more work to support them to develop themselves. This hard work and dedication are what led to our Good Ofsted rating at our Windsor site, which grew into an expanded Pre-School offering in September 2023, and a further expansion in September 2024 offering 84 spaces to families in the area. .

Unfortunately we had to protect the sustainability of Always Growing by closing our Maidenhead site as there wasn't the demand for the full day, year round offering we provided. The sadness of this was outweighed by our excitement of expanding to the upstairs space in Windsor. Now we were able to focus our efforts in fewer locations but with more children.

What are we working on now?

We are always learning, and we are also having an impact already both within our settings and across the Early Years Sector. The team focuses on ensuring every day is a great day for our children and bringing The Always Growing Way to life.

We gratefully draw on the support of our family and friends, team members, and the wonderful families in and around Windsor. And we really mean it when we say Always Growing is like our family! Lewis's Mum is our accountant, his Dad is our Maintenance Manager and his Nan is our Housekeeper. Ben's parents Amanda and Shaun have helped so much along the way with their 'green fingers', as well as helping us to define our clear communication practices. Both Lewis and Ben's wives are qualified teachers and offer valuable consultation to ensure we are doing everything we can for our children and parents.

And we are continuing to develop relationships throughout the Early Years sector.

We have worked with Family to produce content about our ethos and how we work through an article about [how we look after our team](#), and [how we can rethink leadership structure to help reduce stress managers](#). Our team members Laura and TJ also got involved [talking about apprenticeships in Early Years](#). We are passionate about bringing people into the sector, and are big fans of a relatively new qualification called T-Levels and this is [everything you need to know about them](#). Plus, we contributed to [a report](#) about promoting greater respect for the sector. These contributions exemplify what is special about working at Always Growing and also demonstrate our commitment to improving what we do, always.

Lewis recently finished his Doctorate, with his research thesis focusing on a new understanding of leadership in Early Years. He has had several publications in academic literature but [this blog about Professional Confidence](#) really captures an essential focus for nursery leaders right now. Everyone can reflect on their own levels of professional confidence.

Both Ben and Lewis were part of the Experts and Mentors COVID recovery programme where the DfE appointed individuals from the sector to support other settings that have a high level of need or a less-than-good Ofsted rating and we both jumped into this opportunity with both feet. We are so passionate about bringing the sector together and this is a wonderful way of doing it and have taken our learnings from this into where we are now focusing our efforts.

Where is Always Growing going?

Right now, we are focused on:

1. Continue to do the best we can for the children in our care and the staff that provide this care and education.
2. Developing our processes and pedagogy then capturing this and all the wonderful things we do to continue to grow Always Growing You. Development for the sector, by the sector.
3. Increase our impact internationally with our support of Early Education in rural Uganda gaining momentum with Lewis's visit to the region. Captured in [this](#) article.

Therefore, in the next 2 years, we need to:

1. Continue to recruit top talent to help us consolidate and embed outstanding practices.
2. Transform our performance development processes into a product to help the whole sector.
3. Be open to further opportunities to extend our reach.

The Always Growing story is always growing and we are so excited to see what's next...

Ben Bausor and Lewis Fogarty