

# HARROW ONLINE

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## IN PRAISE OF HARROW'S CHILDREN CENTRES

*Posted November 16th, 2017 by admin (<http://harrowonline.org/author/admin/>) & filed under News (<http://harrowonline.org/category/news/>).*

When my first child was born, the internet wasn't what it is now. I left Northwick Park Hospital on a winter's day with my little bundle, a parenting manual and my own nervous instincts to raise my child. That was in the year 2000. Fast forward to 2016 and I left the hospital with my third child on a spring day with a wealth of parenting knowledge in the palm of my hand thanks to my smart phone. You'd think I'd have found it simple but very soon I began to drown in a sea of Instagram perfect parenting images, Net Mum's discussions and Google articles. I was more lost than ever and needed to switch off from the virtual world and find a human to share my parenting highs and lows with. And then I discovered my local children's centre. I'm not sure what I expected when I turned up but I was relieved to be greeted by a friendly receptionist and told I would be taking my baby to a PAFT class. I was soon to learn that it stood for Parents as First Teachers, and this would be my first introduction to being around other parents, babies and professionals. And so began my love for children's centres in Harrow and all they stand for.

Harrow has nine children's centres and these are divided into two hubs called Cedars and Hillview. Each centre is set up to support parents and children from 0-5 as well as running groups such as messy play, singing, PAFT, toy library and so on. Further to this, the centres offer support and advice on anything from sleep issues with your child to advice with weaning. All with no cost to the parent or caregiver. These centres were set up in 1998 nationally as the government had recognised that parents, until their babies turned five, were largely unsupported. In 2002 a huge budget was injected into the centres. Since then children's centres have also suffered with the budget cuts and many have sadly closed down in Harrow. There is the sense of this in the children's centres, that they were once resource rich places. Toys are old but well looked after, and staff do a fantastic job of finding budget-friendly activities. But the strength of the place is in what it offers – a shared space for parents to seek advice and connect with their child through play and learning.

The children's centres stand like lighthouses in Harrow, and it's the staff who work in them that make a difference to the people of this borough. 'It's what you make of them' Sarah a parent who uses the Centre told me. 'When I first came I wasn't sure what to do but then I realised that my child loved the stimulation and I got to be a part of it with her.'

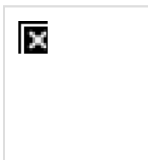
I spoke to Gemma Williams, who's been working at the children's centre for eighteen years, starting as a student placement to her current role as Early Support Hub Manager at the Hillview hub. Her passion for the centre is contagious. 'Hillview was the first children's centre' she tells me, and explains how their aim is to 'get parents away from isolation and to enable and empower them.' The work that goes into this is tremendous. They work one-to-one with families in the community, offer support for the journey of becoming a parent ('womb to world'), tailor bespoke sessions for parents in need and even offer support to teens. She is very keen to point out that all their workshops are evidence-based. Everything which is learned is there for a reason, and groups are created on community needs and local data. Gemma highly praises the 'parent champions' who volunteer two hours of their time in order to engage parents with the Harrow community, she says this helps parents build a network outside of the centre. 'But we do listen to the parent's voice because their voice is so important.' She smiles, 'one parent asked for a weening party because of anxieties around feeding her child and we made it happen. Staff cooked, made different types of pasta and so much more. It was such a fun event.' Amongst all the hard and difficult work which goes on behind the scenes there is an air of celebration for the success stories wrapped up in their belief that every child and every parent matters.

It can be tough navigating your way through the first few years of your child's life, and we need more community-centred approaches to offering support. It's lucky that Harrow still has children's centres which thrive on supporting parents and nurturing young children.

So next time, you know someone who would benefit from unplugging from virtual communities and joining a physical one, or someone who could do with support, suggest a local children's centre. I know it made a world of difference to me.

By Samreen Shah

## 5 RESPONSES TO "IN PRAISE OF HARROW'S CHILDREN CENTRES"



SAM

This really resonates. Harrow's children's centres do a fantastic job. Thanks for sharing your experiences and highlighting this!

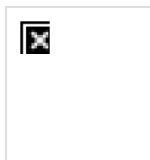
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November 16th, 2017 (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/#comment-4780>)



HARRIET

Very interesting article about Children Centres- makes me wish I lived in Harrow! Thank you for sharing your experience.

Reply (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/?replytocom=4782#respond>)  
November 16th, 2017 (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/#comment-4782>)



ALIA

What an interesting read!

The nursery has a fun and bright environment with professional and caring teachers whom the children respond to well.

Thank you for making us aware of the hidden gems in Harrow!

Reply (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/?replytocom=4844#respond>)  
November 17th, 2017 (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/#comment-4844>)



ALLY

Think very highly of Hillview and the other children centres. Lots of various and interesting activities and lovely to see local mums and discuss concerns with professionals. Thank you Harrow

Reply (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/?replytocom=5071#respond>)  
November 20th, 2017 (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/#comment-5071>)



DEEPA SAMANI

Harrow children's centres have taken me through two maternity leaves- amazing services and so much choice. Couldn't be happier!

Reply (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/?replytocom=5075#respond>)  
November 20th, 2017 (<http://harrowonline.org/2017/11/16/in-praise-of-harrows-children-centres/#comment-5075>)

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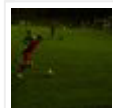
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November 20, 2017



## ABOUT US

**Welcome to the Official Harrow Online website.** Harrow Online is a community portal for all Harrow residents - we are a hub for all things Harrow!

Harrow Online is a community development website working to strengthen communities in Harrow and surrounding areas. We work together with the local community to improve services, bring people together, build the community's voice, and generally make the local community a better place to live.





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