



**120 years of
achievement**

Short history

The City of Westminster Health Society was founded in 1903 by a collection of doctors and philanthropist, among them was Margaret Horn who was a pupil of iconic social reformer, Octavia Hill. During that time the mortality rate of infants in the heart of the capital was appalling – almost 12% of children did not live to their first birthday. There were hardly any healthcare facilities available to families living in such extreme poverty.



Horn and selfless volunteers (mostly women) pioneered child health and welfare decades before we had the NHS and many other modern agencies of today. In its early years, the Society provided Westminster's families with medical and dental inspections, antenatal clinics, cookery classes and more. We even established our own training schemes for nursery staff and Early Years nutrition (which we still have today).

Following the second world war our focus shifted primarily to running high-quality Toddler's Clubs and nurseries that helped prepare children for life's big milestones such as starting school. Growing with the ever-shifting demographics of London, we had opened four of these clubs by 1968. In 1977 we became

Westminster Children's Society with six Toddler's clubs and nurseries attended by over 250 children per day. We remained pioneers of Early Years education and care - with a wide variety of activities to facilitate children's development like music and movement classes, library visits and road safety awareness.

Fast forward to 2006, we began the journey to become a social enterprise. Developing financial self-sustainability, we set about being able to offer the same high quality nursery experience to families across the city regardless of background.

1903:



12% of children did not live to their first birthday

Short history

And then in 2009, with 19 nurseries on our books, we changed our name again - this time to reflect that we had expanded beyond Westminster's borders. Today, as London Early Years Foundation, we support nearly 4,500 children a year, delivering high quality Early Years education and care from birth to 5 years old - no matter what the postcode.

Today we are the UK's largest Early Years social enterprise with around 40% of children in fully funded places. We're proud of always staying close to our founding objectives, and it is the love and support of our wonderful community of staff, parents and supporters that we have reached this milestone.

So please join us this year as we celebrate coming this far. We look forward to sharing more stories about our heritage and our impact across our channels as we go through the months.



40
nurseries

supporting
4,500
children and
families

800⁺
employees

1820s-1911

1820s
-1900s

Social reform movement in the Victorian age campaigned for better conditions for poor populations in Britain's urban centers. They fought for the abolition of child labour and the emancipation of women. Among the key influential figures of this period were Mary Wollstonecraft, Emeline Pankhurst and Octavia Hill – of whom Margaret Horn was a pupil.

**“We all want quiet
We all want beauty
We all need space.”**

Octavia Hill



The City of Westminster Health Society was founded. Among its first pioneers, Margaret Horn began visiting young families caught up in poor living conditions and provided a range of support and information along with selfless volunteers (mostly women).

1903



Started distributing leaflets with information about child health in English, Welsh, Italian, French, Flemish and Yiddish for local Westminster residents.

1907

Initiated a collaboration with National Training School of Cookery – students visited homes to provide families with practical cooking instruction.

1911



1912-1943

1912



Moved from two sites to one centre at Page Street.

1926

The Society had raised enough funds to establish its own maternal welfare service at Marsham Street (where our Central Office now is). It was opened by the Queen Mother, then the Duchess of York, and included a day nursery, sewing and mothercraft lessons.



The society soon established centres on Greek Street and Rochester Row to provide the community access to medical and dental services, 'Mothercraft' and antenatal classes as well as cooking and needlework workshops. These continued in spite of the First World War.

1943

During WWII things carried on almost as usual – apart from Marsham Street being used as an Air Raid Warden rest point! The nursery supported mothers who were busy working for the war effort. Back then the day nursery cost 6 shillings a week (roughly £10).



1945-1959

1945

Along came our NHS (National Health Service). While healthcare was to become universally provided, the Society continued with its more experimental activities in promoting child welfare. With two nurseries now, these were run in partnership with London City Council.



1949

Margaret Horn passes away.

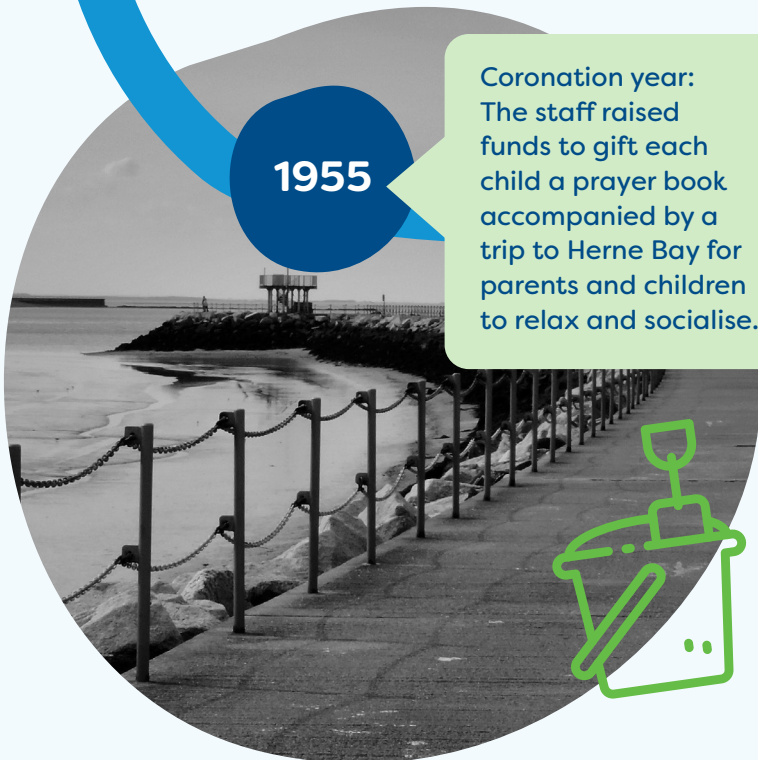
The Society had by then shifted focus primarily to running Toddler's Clubs to prepare 3 and 4 year olds for school as well as day nurseries.

1959

1955

1955

Coronation year: The staff raised funds to gift each child a prayer book accompanied by a trip to Herne Bay for parents and children to relax and socialise.



1966-1977

1966

Now 4 Toddler Clubs and nurseries in Westminster.



A fundraising bazaar was opened by BBC DJ Ed Stewart who interviewed some of Marsham Street's children live on radio.



1970

The Lord Mayor of Westminster opens a new play bus called 'Nellie' (an ex-London bus converted into a nursery unit complete with toys and a slide).



1972

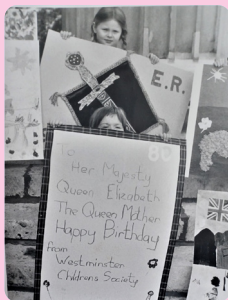
1977

The Society is renamed Westminster Children's Society – now with six settings.



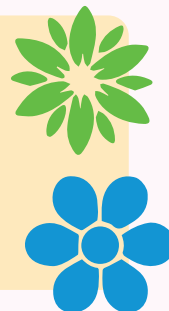
1980-2006

1980



Children paid a visit to Buckingham Place to give the Queen Mother an 80th birthday card.

We were invited to our first Buckingham Palace garden party attended by four staff members.



1996

Lisson Green Nursery opens ground-breaking Sensory Studio with much excitement. Bright lights, sounds and water features were installed in order to stimulate young minds in this innovative environment.

2001

In our centenary year we were up to nine nurseries and, to celebrate, we threw a grand tea party for 500. The event kicked off with a 'Rumble in the Jungle' concert featuring 300 children and members of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.



2003

2006

We began the journey to become a social enterprise to make us financially self-sustaining, and allowing us to offer the same high quality nursery experience to families across the city regardless of their background.



2009-2019

2009

17

nurseries

We become London Early Years Foundation or LEYF for short. This move was to reflect our growth beyond the boundaries of Westminster after opening settings in Camden and Barking and Dagenham as well as to highlight our work in training and research. At this point we had 17 nurseries and plans to expand our horizons even further.

2013

June O'Sullivan, our Chief Executive, hosts the first ever Ofsted Big Conversation which brings together representatives of Early Years Childcare Providers and Ofsted across the UK.

2012

The Olympics came to town. Children and staff from each nursery helped carry the Olympic Torch across London.

2019



Our Chef Academy was launched so we could provide our chefs special qualifications for Early Years nutrition. The academy is also a hub for research and evaluating children's food consumption in nurseries across the country.



2020-2023

2020

Pre-pandemic, Princess of Wales Kate Middleton visits Stockwell Gardens Nursery & Pre-school to serve the children their breakfast. This was also the year we Doubled Down to provide 15 extra hours of funded childcare to our most vulnerable children.



2021

Green
Leys

Launches Level 4 qualification in Sustainability for Early Years enabling staff to become Green Champions.




2023

Our 120th year with 40 nurseries across London and counting. We're soon to open our first purpose-built Thames Reach Nursery.

40
nurseries



A woman with dark skin and short dark hair, wearing a black and white patterned shirt, is smiling and leaning over a table. She is helping a young child with brown hair, wearing a white shirt, who is focused on cutting a red tomato with a green knife. On the table, there are also some bread rolls and a small metal pot. The background shows a blue door and a wooden chair. A large green diagonal shape is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

**Celebrating
wonderful
learning
experiences
every day**