

Pre-school near Didcot must fundraise to 'stay afloat'

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By **Albert Tait** @AlbertTait1
News Reporter

A village pre-school near has been forced to fundraise to make ends meet.

Long Wittenham Pre-School must raise £3,000 so it does not end the academic year in deficit, which a trustee fears would leave it at risk of shutting.

It follows the recent closure of several preschools across Oxfordshire.

Trustee and parent Emily Smout, 41, said: “We’re a little bit scared so many pre-schools around us are closing. If we don’t have the right numbers, with the right children funded, we are always by the line in terms of making sure we keep open.

“We really want to have some buffer.”

While the national minimum wage has risen, funded hours for children aged three and over has stayed the same and doesn’t match the increase.

It means the pre-school, which operates out of Long Wittenham Village Hall, now struggles to meet building costs, rent, staff costs and insurance.

“It’s not just in Oxfordshire, it’s a national issue”, said Mrs Smout, 41, who works for children’s services at Oxfordshire Council.

Dunmore Preschool in shut 'on the spot' last month as it could not afford to re-register with Ofsted and renew its lease, and Rosehill Preschool in Oxford closed in March.

Mrs Smout said Long Wittenham Pre-School, which is run as a charity and has been open since the 1970s, is invaluable to the community and fears what would happen if it shut.

She said: “You see the value every day. We have children from all over.

“I live in this village and my child goes to the pre-school. If I had to get my three-year-old to another setting, I couldn't do it and I wouldn't be able to work.

“Not having a pre-school would decrease the chances of parents meeting other parents at drop-off and pick-up. It would mean some children who don't have access to vehicles are unlikely to access any early year's provision, which also will mean their parents might not be able to work, which could push a family into extreme poverty.”

The pre-school was initially facing a £9000 deficit but has reduced it to just £3,000 through fundraising efforts. It has now turned to GoFundMe to raise the final amount.

“If we can clear the line and raise that £3,000, we will start in a really clear position in September. We have a really good fundraising team, so as long as we've got some of that going on, we think we'll be able to run,” said Mrs Smout.

To help the nursery stay open, visit the GoFundMe page at <https://bit.ly/3pQelzA>.