

# Most Instrumental Early Years Consulting Business Leader 2023 (West Midlands): Deborah Udakis

Established in 2017, Deborah Udakis Consultancy Ltd. is a specialist consultancy firm supporting early years organisations who provide care and education for young children. With 40 years of professional experience in the field, Founder Deborah Udakis is well-equipped to help her clients develop and improve the quality of their early years care through training, advice, and good practice guidance. Here, we speak to her about her career and her experiences in the early years landscape.

Following an extensive career in the early years space, Deborah Udakis established her consultancy in May 2017. As an Early Years Specialist, she aims to inspire confidence in her clients and deliver high-quality results for their businesses. She works with organisations like nurseries, nursery groups, local authorities, schools, and childminder agencies.

At her consultancy, Deborah provides them with training programmes, uniquely created workshops on a range of early years matters, advice, and support and guidance on industry best practices. She delivers bespoke assistance and makes recommendations to clients, addressing specific areas for improvement through targeted and focused interventions.

Prior to establishing her business, Deborah worked as a practitioner and in leadership roles across London authority nurseries and children's centres. She also held a senior role in a local authority Registration and Inspection Unit and helped to develop the Home Childcare Scheme for the Department for Education.

In addition, for 8 years, Deborah worked as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) at Ofsted. In this role, she regularly led inspections of schools, children's centres, and a range of other early years settings. She also trained other inspectors and quality assured the work of her colleagues. As well as this, Deborah played a significant role in carrying out safeguarding audits of inspections and promoting the welfare and learning outcomes of children in care.

Impressively, Deborah also frequently contributed inspection and regulation-based advice to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) and the government. Alongside this, she wrote and contributed towards reports, including HMCI's annual report and other publications.

With a long, proven history of raising standards and supporting positive change in early years care across the maintained, private, voluntary, and independent sectors, Deborah uses her knowledge and understanding of child development, early years education, and regulations to promote good practice across a range of settings.

Throughout the course of Deborah's career, the childcare and early education business landscape has changed significantly due to the greater levels of responsibility, regulation, and scrutiny. "According to Ofsted's data, the vast majority of early years providers are now judged Good or Outstanding," she explains. "However, we continue to have to

challenge outdated attitudes towards 'traditional' views of childcare and the ill-informed assumption that professional early years practitioners are 'only babysitters' and that play has no value."

In the last 13 years, early years businesses have been extremely underfunded, resulting in low wages. The government's "free" childcare is heavily subsidised by nurseries, who cover increasing costs for food and toiletries. This has caused many organisations to close down, effecting the largely female early years workforce. Deborah comments, "Nursery closures and the lack of affordable childcare is the main reason why so many women are unable to join the job market. It simply does not make any economic sense for the Government to pursue their current childcare strategy."

After a lengthy career at Ofsted, Deborah took a leap of faith when she left the organisation in 2017 to establish her own consultancy. "Never did I imagine that what I offer would be so appreciated and in demand," she admits. "Over the years, I have developed wonderful trusting relationships with my clients – most of whom are inspirational women who own their space in the workplace and make their voice heard."

As a woman herself, Deborah is passionate about helping her clients understand that what they have to say is worthy of being heard. "An essential part of my core ethos and work is helping other women to see they aren't alone and to feel supported," she explains. "I become invested and act as a cheerleader and supporter, helping other women to grow their confidence and, ultimately, achieve their goals."

As a result of her outstanding early years consultancy services, Deborah Udakis has been awarded Most Instrumental Early Years Consulting Business Leader, West Midlands, in the Influential Businesswoman Awards 2023. We congratulate her on this achievement and look forward to seeing what she goes on to accomplish in the coming years.

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