

Gym goes online as coronavirus bites

A GYM aiming to break stereotypes and offer women a non-judgemental environment in which to enjoy their fitness journey has been named the Epping Forest Guardian Gym of the Year 2020.

AbFabFit Club, a ladies only gym in Thornwood, was founded two years ago by married couple Jaïne and Mark Alderson.

In January of this year, AbFabFit opened at a second location in Waltham Abbey to meet its ever-growing demand.

"It's not just a gym, it's more of a community", explained Jaïne. "AbFabFit is more geared towards older ladies, but has members in their twenties."

As policy, AbFabFit Clubs does not have any mirrors in any of its work-out areas.

"We feel proud and honoured to have won this award and of the non-judgemental environment we have created.



AbFabFit Club was founded two years ago by married couple Jaïne and Mark Alderson

"Every lady that comes to us feels comfortable the minute they come in, it's just not like a regular gym," Jaïne said. Following the outbreak of coronavirus, the gym was quick to adapt to online classes.

The gym is also helping members socialise with lunch time zoom gatherings and mental wellbeing classes in the evening to help those struggling with isolation.

Outbreak worsens social service crisis

Too few social workers before coronavirus

By Lewis Berrill

ALMOST a fifth of jobs in Essex's child social services were unfilled before the coronavirus outbreak, with concerns the crisis could put vulnerable children at even greater risk.

Experts warn the nationwide lockdown could pile pressure on an already stretched system, with councils across England reporting high vacancy rates and reliance on agency staff.

New Department for Education figures show there were 192 full-time equivalent job vacancies in child and family social work in Essex in September - 20 per cent of a fully-staffed workforce.

Temporary agency staff, who can be far more expensive for councils than regular employees, were covering 39 of these vacancies.

Across England, there were more than 6,000 vacancies, a figure that has increased by four per cent since September 2018.

The Government has predict-



Retired staff are being asked to return. Photo: Radar

ed that up to a fifth of the workforce across Britain could be off work at the peak of the coronavirus.

John McGowan, general secretary of the Social Workers Union, said social workers are already struggling with the effects of the outbreak, with many off sick or in self-isolation, meaning less qualified staff or unqualified assistants could be asked to perform statutory duties.

Mr McGowan said: "Some councils have put an appeal out to people in management or who haven't practised in a while to say 'can you come back to the front line and fill the gaps?'"

He added that some councils were already having to take steps to deal with the shortfall, such as reducing weekly contacts with youngsters on child protection plans to once a fortnight.

Social workers in Essex had an average of 14.2 cases each in September.

The Department for Education says the emergency Coronavirus Act will help social workers continue their "vital role" supporting children and their families.

A spokeswoman said: "We are working urgently to address the additional challenges they face, including through our Act, which will reduce burdens on social workers and help others return to the profession."

But the Social Workers Union says councils need an urgent cash injection, as well as protective equipment to protect front-line workers on home visits.

Schools give protective equipment

MORE than 6,000 pieces of much-needed personal protection equipment have been donated to the NHS by an academy trust.

Doctors and nurses on the frontline tackling the coronavirus outbreak have been urgently calling for extra face masks, goggles and gloves to help them to stay safe while they carry out their work.

Burnt Mill Academy Trust

has 11 primary and secondary schools across Harlow, Epping and Stansted in Essex and Newham in London.

The trust has stripped each of its school science, food technology and design and technology classes of their protective equipment stocks to support the medical work.

It has donated more than 6,000 gloves, hazmat suits, safety goggles, visors, plastic

aprons and shoe covers to the NHS.

Lucia Glynn, BMAT head of operations, said: "We received a request from Essex County Council asking if we had any protective equipment we could donate.

"We felt it was our duty to get as much to those working on the frontline as we could, so we have taken every last item from our 11 schools."

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