

Blossom Education COE 2017
Period covered July 2015 – July 2017

Part 1
Message from the CEO

To our Blossom Stakeholders,

I am pleased to confirm Blossom Education's continued support to the United Nations Global Compact and its ten principles.

The Blossom Nursery group is a chain of six ECO friendly nurseries based in Dubai. Each nursery operates on international best practice with a strong *Triple PPP* (*people/ planet/ prosperity*) focus that uses the positive principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-Corruption that the UNGC focuses on.

We understand the importance and the need of the ten principles in the Education sector, and so our aim from our commitment is to share best practice amongst our fellow education providers in the Middle East and amongst other synergistic businesses.

As an early years education provider we will continue to promote the values of the UNGC and share best practice as inspiration.

In this *Communication on Engagement*, we describe the actions we have taken as a responsible organization to support the UN Global Compact and its principles as suggested for an Educational organization like ours. We also commit to sharing best practice amongst similar organizations by distributing this information with our stakeholders.

We welcome growth and advancement and look forward to working with a greater variety of businesses over the coming year to further educate and strengthen our vision and approach.

Sincerely yours.

Zahra Hamirani, Esq.
Chief Executive Officer
The Blossom Nursery/ Blossom Education

A Blossom History

Blossom Education, a series of nurseries and early learning centers based in Dubai, focuses on educating the children of today, the soon to be leaders of tomorrow. As early years educators we are conscious that 50% of a child's adult intelligence is formed by the age of four. We place special emphasis on creating strong Knowledge Destinies of learning that build awareness, grow curiosity and advance learning and integrate progressive "lively and current" topics as segways towards to building a culture of creativity and consciousness. At Blossom, we value children's early years that lay the foundation for all that is to come.

We chose the *British Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum* to grow nurseries and early learning centers that teach dynamically with a special focus on the prime and specific areas of learning. We then created our very own sensory based framework called *SKYGARDEN*, which we implement alongside the EYFS curriculum. After creating our own framework focusing on learning through the senses and blending it with an internationally recognized curriculum, we then implemented our Triple PPP approach in each day of learning with the idea that decisions must be guided at all levels taking into account many different factors.

Blossom was founded in 2009 on *Triple PPP* principles - equally premising people, planet and prosperity and we aspire to provide the best early years education underpinned by research and data that assures families that the methods we use are both tried and tested yielding strong results for our young learners.

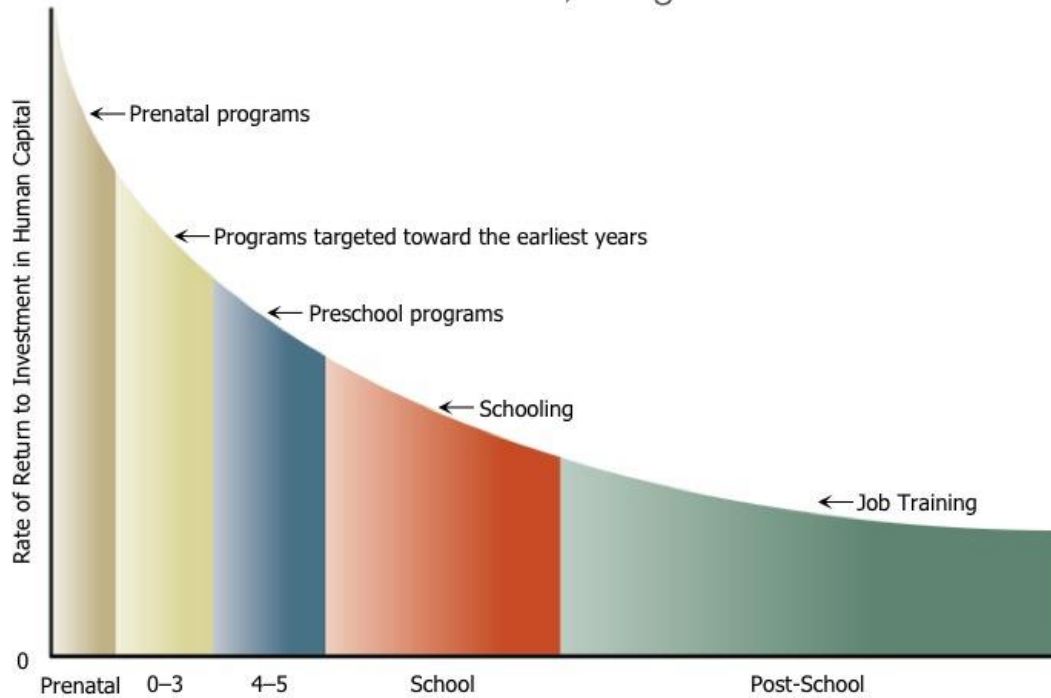
The Blossom offering was founded by Zahra Hamirani, Esq. - a British mother, lawyer, educator and professional who is passionate about the early years and how what happens in the early days leave strong impacts for the future. Hundreds of nurseries and early education providers were explored to finally provide the Blossom offering. Strong affiliations were build with UK Cache, National Day Nursery Association, Montessori groups and various professional affiliations including environmental and sustainability causes. We then built a team of experts from language and literacy development, education, operations, human resources, finance and many more *circles of practice* so together we are team of women who make magic each day. The team is active at education events and in associations working to deliver a first class early years experience that builds both school readiness and experiences that will allow children to gain their confidence, believe in themselves and work to achieve towards their goals.

Blossom understands the importance of the early years and invests heavily in direct to child spend. The Heckman Curve below showcases the results of this - the better the preschool and early years experience the greater the outcome. We constantly benchmark, study and KPI our performance to ensure we build the best offering for our families.

Diagram 1: Heckman Curve

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IS A SMART INVESTMENT

The earlier the investment, the greater the return



Source: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

What drives us at Blossom: *Why* do we do *what* we do the *way* we do it?

Blossom's overall sustainability vision "to plant green seeds, one mind at a time" is achieved through our ethos "believe, achieve, bECOMe." Our sustainability vision is embedded within our core business strategies, curriculum and social engagement and we are public in the way we educate the youth & focus on sharing our methods with the community to further encourage innovative learning engagement tools.

1. The Sustainability Vision as a Core Business Strategy

Blossom was founded and is run on Triple PPP principles. Operationally this is key in all departments from budget setting and financial reporting to Human Resources and 360 reviews to Education and Training. Service businesses have extensive contact with customers, are intangible with labor intensive production and immediate consumption. This means quality has often been hard to measure and so controls and KPI's are central tools to measure success. Blossom has built process alignment tools and reports that ensure key measures are central in what we do where and with whom, when we do it and how we do things at the centers. The *why* for us is set as needing to positively integrate people, planet and prosperity without allowing for a business case to prioritise one above the rest as would be done in a traditional corporate structure. Building this within Blossom allows us to be aligned with the UNGC principles and a variety of sustainability criteria that we have adopted.

2. Curriculum as a Model and Process to build UNGC Awareness

We believe the best way to educate children is by providing them the opportunity to create their own knowledge destinies through exploration, imagination, creation & above all creativity.

Developing our own sensory based approach and linking it to the EYFS curriculum is another way that we ensure our Blossom cooperative has a sustainable future filled with longtails of education and key learning skills. We focus heavily on education through a variety of sustainability topics and integrate recycling & upcycling into daily activities to create a green culture of awareness & action.

Blossom's overall mission is *'to create a safe and stimulating environment for each child to reach their full potential.'* We achieve this mission through our *'Space Impacts Learning'* philosophy. We believe that children's surrounding environment truly shapes and impacts the way that they learn. By providing engaging stimulus, constant change and engagement, numerous physical spaces, places and activities like baby yoga, monkeynastics, outdoor water play, swimming lessons, biking, gardening etc., and a variety of learning experiences through bi-weekly drumming sessions, music and dance classes, mini chef cooking, languages classes and more we are constantly changing the direct space and experiences our children learn in while maintaining the overall stimulating and curiosity enhancing environment.

We discuss the importance of gratitude for basic rights like having a roof over our heads and link this to discussion points around children who may not or do not have access to go to school. We consider the hardships children face getting to school where there is no transport, social and financial barriers to access and have activities such as understanding "what happens if there is no water or electricity access?" By building this directly into the learning for our children we create awareness and engagement.

3. Community Action & Social Engagement as a method to develop UNGC Awareness

Our sustainable social engagement mission is closely tied to our overall mission & delivered through it - to create a green culture of awareness & action through our longtailing approach & through our community engagement. The Blossom Way is a set of values based on openness & honesty created to achieve sustainable excellence. There is a culture of trust, transparency, approvals and audits to keep us aware of what needs to be tracked, when and how.

We implement these values first & foremost in our workforce to ensure they are followed internally & in turn are reflected outward. Through vertical leadership, our values are filtered into our staff who in turn act as Ambassadors. By making our staff Ambassadors for each center, we ensure that our values reach our children & families organically. We audit our supply chain, stakeholders are visually reminded to consider social engagement projects and showcase leadership in long term learnings that we can model in the community and build upon.

Social media is another tool we use to communicate our values to the public. Our values have a strong focus on environmental awareness, energy reduction, ecosystem conservation, recycling & upcycling; topics frequently discussed among staff in regular *Greenbites* meetings, trainings, seminars etc., in the classrooms with our children, with the public via newsletters, flyers, social media & a fully integrated blog. By constantly engaging with the Blossom stakeholders we have created, we ensure that our values are accepted & implemented across a variety of position points.

Our Business case for the UNGC principles

➤ Need

Blossom maps broad trends & development by looking into the needs of Dubai's community and the changes families go through. Our team of Education experts do this by monitoring new development areas, changing regulations & emerging curriculum frameworks. Our communications and educating team maps trends by frequently monitoring & attending mums groups, coffee mornings & look to develop synergies with corporates to research growing demand of early year's services.

We found that our target audience in Dubai is dual-income parents & we understand the gravity of the role we take on as a child's first educator. By offering working families an option of quality all day early year's education and childcare so they could pursue their careers Blossom is building Dubai as a family centric work destination, something that years ago was simply not the case. By analyzing global metrics, multi-language families & what dual-income families really need we aim to incorporate these needs into our structure.

➤ Risks & Opportunities

Operating on the Triple PPP bottomline approach allows us an enhanced delivery of education & responsibility to children & families. We monitor risks & opportunities like how sustainability strategically feeds into our longterm business plans in a holistic & grassroots approach.

Our management team regularly engages with each other, staff, parents & stakeholders to assess Blossom's risks & opportunities. Engagement is through regular meetings, newsletters, surveys, open-houses, focus groups, feedback forms, staff reviews etc. allows us to pivot and get information from a variety of sources. Of course this is an expensive way to run a small business and does increase overhead central costs basis and this is tough to manage in lean times or where there are gaps in the business and perhaps cash flow or revenues are affected. We aim to have strong audit principles in place and rules for spending that are a mark to same and track exceptions and system "fat" to see where sometimes things have to wait til the following quarter. This allows us to remain afloat and sustainable whilst managing issues.

Run as a cooperation & not a corporation, long-term risks & opportunities are identified, assessed & handled internally & decisions are made in the benefit of the overall body of priority - our stakeholders. All relevant educational, environmental, community & marketplace issues are discussed in monthly meetings with so all aspects are covered & assessed holistically.

1. Management Commitment

Built and grown as a grassroots cooperation, Blossom's top management is heavily involved in all CSR decisions. CSR current & future implementation is regularly discussed in bi-monthly marketing meetings, center director meetings, staff greenbites meetings, new staff inductions, community outreach discussions, stakeholders focus groups, newsletters & press releases as a top agenda of importance. Understanding of CSR is key at Blossom & top management expects all

staff to have understanding of CSR opportunities, implementation & KPIs through offered trainings, workshops etc.

Topics discussed include charity events, community engagements, green activities, waste management, energy efficiency, carbon offsetting, staff development & overall incorporation of CSR into Blossom's sustainable growth plan & management approach. Decisions are made internally by management & communicated to stakeholders in through meetings, publications, trainings, newsfeeds, social media etc.

The highest level of governance bodies is represented within our Blossom Family Tree, where matters related to organization's mission of values, codes of conduct and essential principles with implementation are addressed within this framework. Blossom Education's highest level of governing body consists of our Blossom management team. Since we are a very grassroots built company, our approach for governance is very holistic and decisions are often made collectively.

The management team consists of an eclectic group of 20 Blossom staff dedicated to promoting sustainable development throughout all of Blossom's endeavours. Among these staff exists the owners and founders of Blossom Education, who work in unison with the rest of the team. This team works closely with centre directors & deputy managers, who in turn work closely with office staff, office staff, teachers, assistants, cooks, cleaners and all other stakeholders in implementing sustainable development holistically throughout all operations and daily activities. For example at Blossom early learning center all snack preparation (fruit and vegetable) excess waste is composted and used in the garden for growing which is part of the curriculum. This results in a loop of where do we purchase from? what waste will this produce? How will this be used again and how will this link to the learning journey? All these points have different stakeholders but they are united in their local ownership of the decisions and outcomes. Food miles, seasonality and cost are things that were discussed in this example.

Blossom believes in a community approach in the management of all centres. There is not only an open door policy for all Blossom staff to approach the management team at any time, but in fact there are no doors! The management team works literally alongside all staff on rotating shifts across all centres to offer the most opportunity for any of our 200+ staff members to talk to them at any point of time. While formal meetings are scheduled between all staff levels at Blossom, informal catch-ups often take place to provide a platform for discussion, growth and expression of any concerns in a relaxed and comfortable setting. Centre directors conduct morning, afternoon and evening rounds daily at their respective centres engaging with all staff, children and parents and also conduct weekly teachers, assistants and green team meetings. Our Centre directors even took part in a centre swap where they visited other locations and acted as CD for that nursery for one day. This is part of Blossom's engaging and team building activities promoting best practices when it comes to early years' implementation, especially while taking into consideration Blossom's many nurseries.

Staying true to our grassroots nature, we handle issues related to conflicts of interests, expertise of our staff and even our organization's overall strategy when it comes to economic, environmental and social topics as a team. For example we have developed a Teachers Handbook this year and this is published online in view format for a term by all stakeholders to allow for feedback and changes before same is rolled out formally the following year. By allowing for this process we get new insights and perhaps see issues that Management or a narrow band of drafters would have missed.

Part 2

Description of Actions

As an academic organization, we incorporate the UNGC principles into internal operations and communicate the following progress.

As a nursery, education is our primary focus. Our ECO approach is clear through our company ethos 'believe, achieve, bECOMe, as we aim to plant green seeds one mind at a time. Blossom believes that by providing a safe and stimulating environment for children to reach their full potential, the seeds will blossom into conscious and responsible flowers. By providing children the opportunity to create their own knowledge destinies we hope that our precious flowers will pollinate and spread their Blossom-learned traits in their homes, big school and community. This is what we call the Blossom longtail and this is a direct incorporation of the UNGC principles deep into the roots of our DNA as an organization.

We communicate our progress to our direct stakeholders, parents, daily via social media, Google Classroom, parent meetings, emails, newsletters child assessments and progress reports. We share with our stakeholders our policies and KPIs related to the UNGC principles and also share with them key environmental tips and news. We celebrate Earth Day, Earth Hour and even dedicate an entire week where we celebrate all matters green and raise awareness in the community. While everyday activities and classes are taught with recycled material, Green Week has become part of our academic planning and an event that our community now recognizes and takes part in. Our sustainability initiatives and recognitions are displayed at each of our branches as visual commitment and encouragement for our stakeholders. Each area at our nurseries have ECO signs that act as visual reminders for our stakeholders and children.

We share a variety of documents to new parents joining us so they too can get to familiarize with the UNGC principles we follow. We give them a copy of our B book that contains an entire section on ECO living at home and educates them on how we incorporate the principles into our daily operations. To conserve on paper we publish a majority of information online via social media and our website. We dedicated a few pages online to share with stakeholders how we create our academic planning based on ECO topics and how sustainability is heavily enforced at our school. We publish an annual ECO calendar printed on recycled paper with recycled themes. We list all the important environmental days and raise awareness to community events in advance to ensure maximum attendance and impact.

In 2015 we published our first [Sustainability Report](#), where we reported on our energy consumption, waste management and future sustainable development plans. We monitored all the above throughout the following 2 years and continue to report on our success with our stakeholders through periodic updates.

In this reporting we focus on how we deliver the GC principles in our curriculum, as this is our area of expertise. During each term we deliver a six-week academic planning based on the EYFS curriculum using our very own sensory-based approach called *Skygarden*. *Skygarden* teaches children by using natural items from their surrounding environment, promotes the use of recycled items in all crafts and activities, focuses on ECO learning and promotes ECO friendly behavior through characters like *Sensible Sandy* and *Wasteful Wanda*.

If we go through one cycle of our academic planning called *believe, achieve, bECOMe*, also named after our mantra you will see a variety of the integration points. In this cycle we focus on key topics such as HealthyBites eating where we showcase good

food choices, low food waste, meatless Mondays, local food purchasing and produce that we grow ourselves in our Mini Chef program and use in our hot meal school program! Blossom also introduces Sensible Sandy, Wasteful Wanda characters to consider how decisions impact life; introduce concepts such as Sweets and Treats, Packaging choices and understanding how to read food labels; Being Friends and sharing best practice with others, being Thinkative and stretching the learning and much more. Each week we follow a different theme building and stretching the approach. We share our planning with our parents so they too can become aware of how to educate their children sustainability at home and how to continue this longtail approach to thinking and learning.

A deep dive into one point will help understand this approach. *Being Thinkative* is a phrase we use when children deepen their thinking, making them more aware of surroundings and hence learning to value everything around them such as natural life forms and Mother Earth. It is a made up word used by one of our first students (the Founders daughter – Sufiyah) who used it to mindmap and find flow in understanding how things can be related. Very simply being thinkative is the design led approach to thinking without artificial barriers or obstructions of where this can lead you. Allowing children the ability to explore without judgement of right or wrong allows for a more open and mindful outcome and the confidence to share this learning with others – a strong action and impact point we like to see.

Part 3 – Measurement of Outcomes

Partnerships formalized with mutual aims to advance the UN Global Compact principles

Blossom values like-minded organizations and we always strive to partner with organizations who share our ethos.

To reach a larger audience and work together in mutual understanding towards the UNGC principles we joined our local Dubai Chamber Sustainability Network. We collaborated with 43 other company member towards the principles. We took part in the Waste Management, Sustainable Development and Road Safety task groups. We shared all our work and commitment publically via our sustainability report, newsletters, events, campaigns and talks.

We support local initiatives annually such as Emirates Environmental Group, Dubai Cares, PoshPaws Animal Sanctuary where we take part in their campaigns, collect funds and share knowledge about their initiatives.

As an education provider, we create corporate collaborations using our Blossom ECO Calendar, where we encourage like-minded organizations to longtail our recycled children's learning tool and share with their customers.

In our 2017/2018 calendar we have partnered with schools, medical providers, insurance providers and other strategic partners that share the idea that the UNGC principles are of value and in particular are engaged in Principles 1, 7,8, 9. They will be enabled to access our customer base and we will access theirs in a strategic, green way and with similar social talking points. Events and communications will similarly be commissioned and twitter, facebook live events and other platforms will be used to reach a broader audience of the thinks we do.

Lastly, Blossom has started engaging in a variety of SDG Local Take Action projects including requesting access for groups such as *Financial Innovation for SDG's* and using Guidance documents such as *Fiduciary Duty in the 21st Century* and *2018 Toolbox* to build our Annual Strategy document. This is particularly important this year as we are growing and introducing institutional investment into the company and will have further reporting and decision making guidelines to contend with. By auctioning and including these elements into the Strategy document we continue to premise and grow the idea that our business – The Blossom Nursery would not be the company it is today without adherence to the principles, process and outcomes that truly make up our company culture and service that stakeholders seek.