

OUR JOURNEY THROUGH LOCKDOWN

Written by Finance Director, Mrs Julie Tropeano

From working during lockdown to now reopening the park, from compliments to complaints and what we still have to face in the dark.

A day like no other, when we had to close our doors, the unknown pandemic was growing so fast and with its own laws.

The zoo became a ghost town and so eerily quiet, with only a handful of our usual staff.

But unlike other businesses where you could switch off everything and close, we still have over 250 species of animals that need to be fed and cared for in their home.

The keepers worked on rotation with many volunteering too, some becoming famous for their videos and tv appearances too.

With all new expansion plans suddenly at a halt, we had to revert to maintaining and repairing with our materials we had left in stock.

Our gardeners and grounds men had a final sweep and then only a handful remained to help with the zoo upkeep.

From our commercial teams – Admission, Retail, Playarea and Catering too, all the tills locked and then sadly all our income stopped.

Our Education team sadly also hit, as no children for them to teach, the bookings had to be cancelled as children all out of reach.

Our Guest Services team who were planning ready for Easter time and now had the very sad role of phoning & cancelling & postponing all.

From our Admin, Marketing, Cash office and our Accounting team, everything was brought up to date and then as they left was when our hearts began to ache.

With a handful of staff remaining now from the various teams, we all became multitaskers to keep the zoo alive and we became a small bubble team.

The first two months were the toughest, as no cash coming in, but our previous two months suppliers ouch now needed paying too.

We had to take action or we would face closure & your request was to keep you up to speed with life at the zoo with videos and live feed.

From the Operating Fund being set up and selling Top Trumps online, not forgetting the fundraising events so many of you aligned.

The staff that were placed on Furlough, we thank you so much, it was not an easy thing to have to do, but has helped save us too.

So with TV and social media coverage the funds began to flow and a new feeling within the zoo team was starting to glow.

The smiles came back on faces as we planned to reopen, but having to patiently wait for Boris and the government to say 'yes you can open'.

The one way system was all set up but continually having to be rearranged, as the goal posts kept moving as to what we needed to change.

The staff were returning and planning for the day that we could say, 'thank you to you all who have given us hope to survive and to feed all the animals big and small.'

You may think opening the doors is enough to stay afloat, but our business plan has had to change as to not rock the boat.

"What do you mean? I hear you say"

With being closed at Easter and three key months lost, with restrictions and with low numbers now, it caps our income so much.

August is the normal month without any restrictions, that commercially supports us through the long year ahead. When we sadly have not so many visitors and it is winter time, please think of us as to close would surely be a crime.

For those who come and spend and enjoy their day, we hope you will return, but for those who state we are greedy we hope you understand and now see our concern.

We thank you for all saving your pennies and spending in the shop as we have some lovely products already in stock, so if it is someones birthday or maybe Christmas too, why not support us and come & shop at Colchester Zoo.

For those purchasing ice creams and snacks, we thank you again, as our Catering team have had to adapt and so much want to remain.

E-tickets are non-refundable so only buy if you want to attend, as I'm afraid we cannot or will not refund you, but can only amend.

For those of you are cautious or shielding maybe best to stay away for now, and support us when it could be tough in our later months ahead. From the donators we have spoke with and that have sent letters and cards of support, we bless you all and thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

