

# Annual report to the Parish Council 2022

It was great to be starting up again after Covid, we were not sure how many families would be interested but felt that after lockdown there would be many children who had missed social interaction with their peer groups. Many of our previous children had moved on to school, so apart from a couple of familiar faces, we were a bit unsure who would be around. There were also certain practical challenges, such as cleaning and sterilising all the toys, keeping windows open, no singing and finding some more volunteers.

I remember thinking it would be good to get 4 or 5 children to the first meeting; when 9 came it was wonderful. Lots of new faces and new babies in the village. We have been very pleased with how things have moved forward - we continue to grow in numbers, with up to 17 on occasions. We tend to average 12 or 13 on most weeks.

There is a good range of age and abilities within the group so we provide a wide range of toys and crafts. A small battery powered bike has proved very popular with the older toddlers while the toy kitchen with its food, tea-set and plates continues to be the favourite toy in general. With the weather improving, we hope to use the back garden of the hall for more sand and water play, we are planning to start planting some seeds this term and using the greenhouse. The children have also been watching the tadpoles in the pond.

The crafts remain very popular and the children have made presents for Mother's Day, some Easter wreaths and chicks and a wide variety of sculptures and beautiful pictures. The crafts are also very popular with the mums who have also made some wonderful creations alongside their children.

It has been lovely to meet some new mums, nans and even a few dads to the group. We have 1 new male volunteer who originally came to help set up and has never left. The train and car tracks have greatly improved !

At Christmas we were very lucky to have a visit from Father Christmas, thanks to Al Stewart, and all the children were given a book and some treats. Our volunteers, Sue, Margaret, Tim and Rita continue to give fantastic support and spoil us with a range of healthy options for snacks.

Within the community we have established links with the pre-school and have a joint play and 'get to know the school' session next week. Not all the parents will be interested as we have learnt that many children go outside of the village to school. Father Anthony pops in from time to time and we are hoping to start a story session with him. We are making him work for his tea and biscuit! We often get grandparents come to the group with their grandchildren and they are great at lending a hand.

We are now three quarters the way through our first year back and it has been a very positive experience, it's great to see friendships bloom between new mums who have said that the impact of covid has been isolating for them as well as their children, to see the toddlers learn new skills and to welcome many new babies into Stoke. Without the support of the Parish Council we would not be able to do this. Your ongoing support covers the rent of the hall and some more boxes and mats, while we can cover the materials and snacks needed to run.

Many Thanks