



St Mark's Community Centre, St Mark's Road, Bath, BA2 4PA  
Registered Charity No: 1029494  
Web site: [www.widcombeacorns.org.uk](http://www.widcombeacorns.org.uk)

## **Widcombe Acorns Pre-school Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 - 31st July 2021**

### **Our objectives and activities**

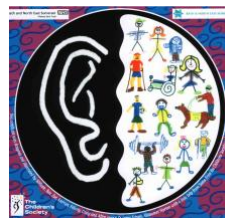
Established over forty years ago, Widcombe Acorns provides full day-care for up to 40 pre-school children, aged between 3 years and statutory school age during the 2020-21 academic year. We are open to all local children and their families regardless of their race, colour, creed or ability.

We are committed to providing a caring and secure environment where children can play, learn and grow, happily and safely. Each individual child's learning is encouraged by providing a well balanced and stimulating range of activities across the areas defined in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Our approach is child-led and based on observation, research and documentation of our children at play.

We respect each individual child, and encourage them to progress at their own pace and therefore reach full potential. Paramount importance is placed on the development of each child's personal, and emotional skills. Self-confidence is encouraged in a sensitive, responsive, warm and loving environment. We work towards each child being a valued member of the group and wider community so that they have a strong self-image and high self-esteem.

At Widcombe Acorns we respect parents and carers as the child's first educator, and endeavour to ensure that they are a key part of their child's current and future learning, and are involved in all aspects of pre-school life. All our staff are given the opportunity to gain further appropriate qualifications that will benefit themselves and the whole group, and we place a great importance on on-going training and skills building.

We have a fully comprehensive Operational Plan in place, which sets out our practice, procedures and all essential policies, such as child protection and equal opportunities. This is reviewed on an on-going basis.



**OFSTED Unique Reference Number: 133108.**

## **Structure, governance and management**

Our pre-school is managed by an annually elected voluntary committee made of parent trustees, who meet a minimum of six times a year. The purpose of our committee is to oversee the running of the pre-school and to provide input into matters of policy. Along with the Administrator and the Pre-School Leader, it is responsible for the good management of the pre-school's budget. Its aim is to support the staff in providing a safe, caring and stimulating environment for the children in attendance. It also has a responsibility, reflected in its election by our parents, to communicate parental wishes to the pre-school leader and act as an arbitrator, if necessary.

In accordance with our constitution, parents at the pre-school's AGM, which is usually held just prior to the autumn half term, elect the committee annually. All trustees are subject to CRB Enhanced Disclosure clearance.

Our current trustees were appointed at our Annual General Meeting held on 27th November 2018:

Helen Chapman - Chair  
Liz Moore – Secretary  
Jo Shanmugalingam - Treasurer  
Sophie Taylor – Health & Safety Officer  
Helen Hudson - Fundraiser

Our trustees give their time voluntarily and receive no remuneration or benefits in return.

We are governed by a constitution based on The Pre-school Learning Alliance Model 2005, which was adopted on 30th April 2008. The Pre-school Learning Alliance, of which we are members, is a national charity which promotes quality care and education for the under fives. This organisation also provides an advisory service and our insurance package, which is reviewed on an annual basis.

## **Chair's report 2020-21**

2020/21 has been another eventful and challenging year for Acorns with many positives, set against a background of ongoing challenges in the sector and continued turmoil as a result of the Covid pandemic.

### **Staffing**

Acorns continues to enjoy a high adult:pupil ratio which enables us to provide enhanced curriculum opportunities, provide additional support to children with disabilities or special educational needs, and to run forest school activities in the way that we do.

Staffing has remained consistent with no turnover in key staff. The struggle to recruit adequate supply staff continues.

### **Registrations**

Acorns was full for Academic year 2020/21.

Acorns continues to be a very popular choice in the community and has built a very strong reputation, with many families returning with siblings.

### **Challenges**

Funding remains a challenge, operational costs are covered but Acorns needs to use reserves or fundraise for significant environmental improvements like the recent kitchen replacement and the ongoing investment in the forest school. We are extremely grateful for several financial gifts made to Acorns by parents this year and for all their continued support with our online raffles.

We are in the process of agreeing a new Memorandum of Understanding with our landlords, St Mark's Community Centre. Members of our committee have been working with St Marks' trustees to develop a partnership agreement which reflects the mutual benefit each charity provides, and reconciles the needs of maintaining a listed building with providing a safe, fun and engaging learning environment for Acorns' pre-school children.

### **Committee**

Recruitment to the committee is always difficult as parents have increasing pressures on their time and many more are working full time. I am incredibly grateful to our committee for 2020/21 for giving so much of their time and supporting the pre-school through a tough year.

**Helen Chapman**  
**Chair, Acorns Committee**

## **Pre-school leader's report**

We are happy to report that we have survived another year of covid concerns. Although some staff members did contract covid throughout the year, we stayed relatively healthy and managed to stay open and viable to all of our families throughout last year. We are grateful to our families who supported us by staying as safe as they possibly could, following our instructions to keep children at home when poorly. This helped us to get through the year relatively unscathed.

Unfortunately, we had to make the difficult decision at the beginning of the year not to accept children who needed to attend another setting as well as Acorns. This meant that we were not able to accommodate all of the children who had applied last January. Luckily for us we had plenty of children on the waiting list and so we were able to quickly fill those spaces and open to a full cohort in September.

We continued to follow the guidance, which did not allow other adults on the premises, so this was another year of parents having to stay outside the door. This meant that all of our fundraising events had to be cancelled and we could not run any of our shows with an audience to watch the children. This was disappointing for the parents of course, however, the children still had a great time. The Christmas show was filmed and sent out to parents and the staff team ran the Christmas party. We did manage to have a parents' evening in the garden later in the year, all socially distanced and with masks. This was a great success and we will be continuing to run parents' evenings in this way in the future.

### **Committee**

Thank you to our wonderfully supportive committee members, Helen C, Jo, Sophie, Liz and Helen O. Even though we could not meet in person these committee members were there for us every step of the way and we are very grateful to them.

### **The Acorns team**

The team go from strength to strength. It has been such a difficult few years for everyone, with the trustee negotiations being so challenging, then covid hitting the world, it feels like we have faced huge challenges over the past few years. The Acorns team have stayed positively stoic throughout, supporting each other when necessary. I am so grateful to them all. Juliette, in particular, has been a fantastic support; we work incredibly well together and we have managed to weather the storm, even though there have been times over the past year that it has been difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. A HUGE thank you to Juliette, Helen, Sam, Hazel, Tigi, Pip, Lisa, Emma and Donna.

### **Friends of Acorns**

We were approached by some ex-Acorns parents last year to suggest that they form a 'friends of Acorns' group. This consists of ex and current Acorns parents, who have various skills and talents, that will offer their support to Acorns whenever necessary. The founders met with the St Mark's trustees to discuss the issues that have been dominating us for the past few years. They have pledged to be there for Acorns whenever they are needed. This community spirit and support is what Acorns is about and we are very grateful and in awe of these parents. Thank you to Daisy, Vishaka and Shona for the idea and the support.

### **St Mark's negotiations on Acorns' rights**

Helen C and Jo took over the negotiations with the St Mark's trustees from our two lawyer parents, Rich and Andrew and our previous Chair, Antony. We had some outside advice on our rights and this gave us a better basis for what rights Acorns have. The negotiations have been slow due to Covid, however, they are progressing, which is a relief for all involved. Thank you to Helen and Jo for leading on the negotiations.

### **Finances**

Without being able to run any of our usual fundraising events we had serious concerns over how we could stay viable last year. However, our fabulously supportive parents went above and beyond, ensuring that our two raffles of the year, Christmas and Summer, were incredibly well supported, with ex-parents, current parents and future parents buying huge amounts of raffle tickets to ensure that Acorns could stay afloat. The tickets purchased raised more than we usually do when we run the fundraising events! We thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

### **Outside classroom**

Our wonderful outside classroom has made such a difference to our daily forest school sessions. Children are no longer reluctant to participate in the winter sessions, as they are now a mixture of outside and a lovely, warm, inviting space to go to drink hot chocolate, read stories, sing and take part in activities in the warm. It is an incredible resource and we are forever grateful to the People's Post Code Lottery for the funding to build it.

### **Outside covered area**

Unfortunately the outside covered area, which we have been hoping to build to recoup lost hall space, has still not materialised. We are working with a local designer and builder to design a space that the trustees will give us permission to erect. This will be a pergola type space, with tensile sail sides and roof for inclement weather. This is an on-going issue, as we may have to return the funding if we cannot build this soon. Luckily, we have been given an extension due to covid. We are hoping that the more positive negotiations between our new committee members and the trustees may help this to progress next year.

### **Our environment**

The St Mark's trustees had a lot of tree work completed in the garden this year, which gave us lots of wood chip to enhance the forest school areas. The children and team worked hard to spread this around the garden and make the areas more defined and useable in the wetter weather. We also planted hundreds of bulbs and enhanced our planting areas. Emma, who is a wonderfully knowledgeable gardener, worked with the children to plant lots of fruit and vegetables, which they then harvested throughout the year and cooked or ate straight from the soil. We have been able to invest in some new resources to enhance our provision. We have bought some new trikes, the first in many years, we have a new rope swing under the Yew tree, we have bought more wood working tools and an oven for inside baking.

### **Looking ahead**

It is difficult to plan our future as the world is presently such an uncertain place. I believe that the last few years have demonstrated that we can survive however. We have so much support from the local community that Acorns continues to be precious, not only to the staff team, but also to the huge amounts of parents and children we have served over many, many years. This gives us strength and hope for a bright future.

## **Fundraising report**

As the Covid pandemic raged ever onwards we were yet again unable to hold our usual fundraising activities; the Christmas show and party, the Bath Half Marathon and the annual Summer Party in the garden. The children did however still have their own Christmas show which was filmed so the parents could enjoy watching the performances. We also laid on a Christmas party for the children so they enjoyed a party lunch with the staff and their fellow Acorns.

We continued to run our online raffles through Eventgroove Fundraising instead of the usual raffles at the actual events themselves. These have proved very successful and once set up can be easily managed by Antony and Juliette. We managed to raise a reasonably healthy £4379 (net) this year which will help enormously going forward so that we can replace some very worn out resources such as trikes and continue to grow our Forest School.

We really hope that our usual parties can resume in the coming academic year as not only do they raise significant and much needed funds for Acorns, they are also a great way of meeting and making new friends and they have become much loved and eagerly anticipated social events within the local community.

**Juliette Davies**

## Registration secretary's report

### Occupancy rates

Overall occupancy rate was good for 2020-21 with sessions filled apart from Fridays where only 23 of the morning sessions were sold and 17 of the afternoon sessions out of the 25 available. Friday afternoons remain an ongoing issue but we do reduce staffing accordingly.

### Statistics for September 2020-21 intake

Total number of children allocated a place	36
Number of returning children	0
Number of siblings	20
Number carried over from previous year's waiting list	0
Number of new children	16

This was the third year of the breakfast club option which starts at 8am, and the 4pm finish. Early starts at 9am are still available. Attendance still varies from day to day – see below:

Monday	8am – 6, Monday 9am – 8, Monday 4pm – 3
Tuesday	8am – 8, Tuesday 9am – 5, Tuesday 4pm – 6
Wednesday	8am – 7, Wednesday 9am – 8, Wednesday 4pm – 2
Thursday	8am – 5, Thursday 9am – 7, Thursday 4pm – 4
Friday	8am – 0, Friday 9am – 6, Friday 4pm - 3

**Juliette Davies**  
**Administrator**

## Financial analysis

An enormous thank you to Mr. Alistair Mathers, who once again very kindly offered his time to produce our end of year accounts this year. Thank you so much for your generous support, your time, advice and expert number crunching. We couldn't do it without you!

### Income

Pre-school income increased last year from £172,520 in 2019-20 to **£211,268** in 2020-21. This is due in part to a decrease in fee income, despite an increase in EYE funding and donations. We are still in the early stages of seeing the full impact of the roll out of the government's extended funding policy and it will take a few years before this stabilizes and we can see the true picture.

The introduction of this new type of funding has brought with it considerable challenges for the management team. Acorns receives funding at £4.14 per hour per child from the government but the actual hourly cost for a child in Acorns is £6.50 per hour. This is a significant shortfall and would make it impossible for Acorns to continue to cover the costs through fundraising. According to BANES the EYE funding is designed to cover the basic level of care and opportunities such as minimum staff ratios, minimum staff qualifications, environment etc. Anything above and beyond this basic level of care can be charged for, including a setting which is graduate led, the qualifications and experience of the staff team, Forest school activities, yoga, baking, high staff to child ratios, resources etc Because Acorns is such a high quality setting and offers all the above (and so much more) we had no choice but to introduce a new fee structure to cover the shortfall. It was the only way we could continue to offer the very best quality care and education for our children.

### Expenditure

Expenditure has increased from £176,403 to **£205,979** this year. Staff wages and employment costs of £179,705 (this includes the cost of the staff pension) continue to make up the majority of this amount standing at of our overall expenditure.

Fundraising efforts have contributed £5,311 of gross fundraising income with a net income of **£4,379**. A big thank you to everyone who helped out at all the events throughout the year, you've been truly amazing, we simply couldn't do it without you!

### Reserves policy as agreed by trustees on 15th May 2007

It was agreed back in 2007 that Acorns would aim to build a reserve fund of £12,000. This was considered equal at the time to a pre-school term (6 weeks) outgoings. Our current restricted reserves stand at £10,000. The restricted reserves are to be used in the event of forced closure relocation, redundancy, insolvency or in any other eventuality that the Management Committee sees fit. The amount to be placed in the restricted reserves fund is reviewed annually at management committee meetings. Unrestricted reserves (i.e the balance of the savings account) amount to £7,734.76. This money is for use on refurbishment and capital expenditure as and when required.

### Conclusion

The introduction of a new fee structure following the extension of the EYE to up to 30 hours a week has been a challenging for Acorns and parents alike. There was simply no possibility



that our pre-school (nor many others for that matter) could survive this increase in funded hours without a significant increase in the hourly rate received from BANES. Obviously this did not materialize so many settings have been forced to charge for extras to make up for the loss in fee revenue. We are hoping that eventually this will ease the pressure on fundraising, although this year has been another cost heavy one with the ongoing need to re-fit and refurbish the pre-school rooms. We hope that next year we will get a clearer picture of the true financial implications of these changes. In the meantime we continue to manage costs carefully and hope that going forward we remain financially viable.

**Juliette Davies**  
**Administrator**

## **Wishes for the coming year**

- For the negotiations with the St Marks current trustees to progress and to stay positive.
- For our rights to the spaces we have occupied for many, many years to be recognised.
- For the covered area to be constructed, or a decision to be made on whether this can progress.
- For more outside storage for forest school resources.
- A new cover for the story telling chair.
- New wheelbarrows, both adult and child sized.
- To fix our very old and disintegrating mud kitchen, or to build a new one in its place.
- To award the staff a long overdue payrise
- To fully fund one place for a disadvantaged child.

## Widcombe Acorns Pre-school

### Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31st July 2021

#### A. Pre-school

	Year Ending 31 July 2020	Year Ending 31 July 2021
<b>Income £</b>		
Early Years Entitlement	85,041	100,895
Fees received	85,743	97,518
Extra funding	146	7,405
Bank interest	30	1
Donations	1,560	5,449
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>172,520</b>	<b>211,268</b>
<b>Expenditure £</b>		
All employment costs	166,861	179,705
Covid furlough receipts	(13,262)	Nil
Rent and utilities	8,634	10,524
Insurance	939	Nil
Education/training	194	763
Membership fees/subs	530	1,048
Cleaning	785	1,554
Educational resources	931	1,857
Office administration	2,099	2,363
Equipment/maintenance	3,604	2,522
Snacks	2,683	2,759
Garden	1,134	821
Sundries	1,271	1,164
Legal fees	Nil	899
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>176,403</b>	<b>205,979</b>
<b>Net pre-school income/ (expenditure)</b>	<b>(3,883)</b>	<b>5,289</b>

## B. Fundraising

Income	5,982	5,311
Expenditure	260	932
Net income from fundraising	5,722	4,379

## C. Postcode Lottery

Income	Nil	Nil
Expenditure	Nil	Nil
Amount available	Nil	Nil

## D. Strong box donation

Income	Nil	460
Expenditure	Nil	Nil
Amount available	Nil	460

## E. Cash summary

Total income	178,502	217,039
Total expenditure	176,663	206,911
Net income/(expenditure)	1,839	10,128

**F. Opening cash position**

<b>Current account</b>	19,765	21,574
<b>Postcode lottery</b>	6,603	6,603
<b>Strong box donation</b>	Nil	Nil
<b>Savings account</b>	17,767	17,797
<b>Total</b>	<b>44,135</b>	<b>45,974</b>

**G. Closing cash position**

<b>Current account</b>	21,574	31,038
<b>Postcode lottery</b>	6,603	6,603
<b>Strong box donation</b>	Nil	460
<b>Savings account</b>	17,797	18,001
<b>Total</b>	<b>45,974</b>	<b>56,102</b>
<b>Net inflow/(outflow)</b>	<b>1,839</b>	<b>10,128</b>

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## **Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of Widcombe Acorns Preschool**

I report on the accounts of the Trust for the year ended 31st July 2021.

### **Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner**

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 43(2) of the Charities Act 1993 (the 1993 Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the accounts under section 43 of the 1993 Act; To follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity
- Commission under section 43(7)(b) of the 1993 Act and
- To state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

### **Basis of independent examiner's report**

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

### **Independent examiner's statement**

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

(1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

- to keep accounting records in accordance with section 41 of the 1993 Act;

and

- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 1993 Act have not been met; or

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

**ALISTAIR H. MATHERS FCA**

Meadowgate  
Dark Lane  
Bathampton  
BA2 6SZ

10<sup>th</sup> November 2021