



St Mark's Community Centre, St Mark's Road, Bath, BA2 4PA

Registered Charity No: 1029494

Web site: www.widcombeacorns.org.uk

Widcombe Acorns Pre-school Annual Report 1st August 2021 - 31st July 2022

Our objectives and activities

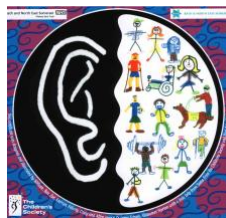
Established over forty years ago, Widcombe Acorns provides full day-care for up to 40 pre-school children, aged between 3 years and statutory school age during the 2021-22 academic year. We are open to all local children and their families regardless of their race, colour, creed or ability.

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:

Nicky Muller - Chair
Katie Twynam - Secretary
Lindsey Purser - Health & Safety Officer
Jade Parfitt - 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 2021-22

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 2021/22.

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.

Nicky Muller

Chair, Acorns Committee

Pre-school leader's report

We have had such an incredibly enjoyable year. Coronavirus restrictions continued to lift as the year progressed and so, even though we started the year in 'bubbles,' working in different areas of the garden and having different sittings for lunches and playtimes etc, we were able to all be together by November and settle back into a sense of normality, which felt such a relief for everyone. We even had an audience for our leaver's show, our first in three years, and what a show it was! We visited nursery rhyme land, where our Hansel and Gretel characters bumped into Mary, Mary and her flowers, Twinkle, twinkle stars, The Grand Old Duke of York, 5 little monkeys and 5 little men in a flying saucer, such a great show and so amazing to welcome back an audience. The children had a blast.

Committee

Thank you to our committee for their support this year, Nicky Muller, Lyndsay Purser, Katie Twynam and Jade Parfitt. We are very grateful for all the support you gave us, particularly with the Summer party.

The 'A' team

Acorns is Acorns because of the incredibly wonderful staff team. We have worked together for many years and I cannot thank them enough for all of their hard work. It is a difficult sector to work in, more so recently as the cost of living keeps rising, yet our wages remain stagnant. People are leaving the sector in droves, it is becoming more challenging to continue to work in a sector where we are undervalued by the Government, and under paid. Not through any fault of Acorns, simply because there is no money there to give due to the underfunding of the sector. The team here deserve HUGE pay rises and we wish more than anything we could pay them what they are worth. Luckily for us and for our families, the team are dedicated, passionate early years teachers. We do what we do because we love making a difference to young children and feel pride in giving children the best possible experiences before they go to a more formal setting. Thank you Juliette, Helen, Sam, Hazel, Tigi, Emma, Donna, Pip and Katie, you are an incredible team.

St Mark's negotiations

The negotiations with the St Marks' trustees continue. The trustees have written a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to lay out how the two charities can work together going forward. Jo Shanmugalingam has continued to work as a liaison this year to try to find a version of the MOU that we can all agree to. Thank you to Jo for all of her hard work, we really appreciate all you have done to support us.

The outside covered area

Unfortunately, the discussions for the outside covered area have come to a halt presently. This is something we hope to discuss later in the year as we struggle in the winter and on wet days to accommodate the children's playtimes now we no longer have the hall on these days.

Looking ahead

We continue to be in a precarious position financially, this year has been a challenge and unfortunately, we have made a significant loss. We will need to raise our fees for September to try to get back to a place where we can break even. This is becoming more of a challenge in the current climate and we are aware that many people are struggling. We are facing a rent rise next year as well as a rise in utilities, food etc. It is a worrying time for the team. I hope we can make it through another year and start to plan for financially better times ahead.

Fundraising report

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 held three online raffles during the year and they continue to prove popular and raise more money than our old style paper raffles.

The summer party was a huge success and after missing out on a few years of summer parties due to the Covid pandemic it was great to be back in the garden with the children and parents celebrating the end of the academic year. With a live band, stalls, a BBQ, a table of salads and breads plus an actual mobile bar provided and run by one of the parents (we didn't have to buy the alcohol it was all very generously donated) everyone managed to have a jolly good time. We also purchased some card machines to facilitate card payments as cash becoming increasingly rare since Covid.

We managed to raise a reasonably healthy £3,963 (net) this year which will help enormously going forward so that we can replace some very worn out resources and continue to grow our Forest School.

Juliette Davies

Registration secretary's report

Occupancy rates

Overall occupancy rate was good for 2021-22 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 2021-22 intake

Total number of children allocated a place	36
Number of returning children	0
Number of siblings	13
Number carried over from previous year's waiting list	0
Number of new children	23

This was the fourth 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 – 5, Monday 9am – 18, Monday 4pm – 5
Tuesday	8am – 5, Tuesday 9am – 16, Tuesday 4pm – 3
Wednesday	8am – 2, Wednesday 9am – 17, Wednesday 4pm – 3
Thursday	8am – 5, Thursday 9am – 18, Thursday 4pm – 5
Friday	8am – 4, Friday 9am – 15, 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 decreased last year from £211,268 in 2020-21 to **£196.767** in 2021-22. This is due in part to a decrease in fees received, a drop in donations and despite an increase in EYE funding. 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 £4.30 per hour per child from the government but the actual hourly cost for a child in Acorns is closer to £8.00 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 **£205,979** to **£210,862** this year. Staff wages and employment costs of £185,434 (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 £6,240 of gross fundraising income with a net income of **£3,963**. 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

Finances at Acorns remain as precarious as ever; we seem to have one good year, one bad and the challenges of managing the expenditure against the cost of living crisis that has erupted recently has only added to that pressure. Fees will need to be reviewed more frequently to ensure we remain financially viable.

Juliette Davies
Administrator

Wishes for the coming year

- For the Memorandum of Understanding to be completed and both parties be content with the outcome.
- For Acorns to stay a secure unit where we can have rights over our spaces without worry.
- For the outside classroom to be sanded and re-varnished.
- To re-open the discussions on building a covered outside area.
- To replace our wooden garden house, which is slowly falling apart!
- Replace our old wheelbarrows.
- To ask for permission to build a more permanent wood working area.
- A new cover for the story-telling chair

Widcombe Acorns Pre-school

Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31st July 2022

A. Pre-school

	Year Ending 31 July 2021	Year Ending 31 July 2022
Income £		
Early Years Entitlement	100,895	101,229
Fees received	97,518	94,543
Extra funding	7,405	740
Bank interest	1	4
Donations	5,449	251
Sub-total	211,268	196,767
Expenditure £		
All employment costs	179,705	185,434
Covid furlough receipts	Nil	Nil
Rent and utilities	10,524	9,560
Insurance	Nil	1,106
Education/training	763	475
Membership fees/subs	1,048	606
Cleaning	1,554	1,002
Educational resources	1,857	2,026
Office administration	2,363	3,224
Equipment/maintenance	2,522	2,056
Snacks	2,759	3,244
Garden	821	785
Sundries	1,164	1,344
Legal fees	899	Nil
Sub-total	205,979	210,862
Net pre-school income/ (expenditure)	5,289	(14,095)

B. Fundraising

Income	5,311	6,240
Expenditure	932	2,277
Net income from fundraising	4,379	3,963

C. Strong box donation

Income	460	Nil
Expenditure	Nil	Nil
Amount available	460	Nil

D. Cash summary

Total income	217,039	203,007
Total expenditure	206,911	213,139
Net income/(expenditure)	10,128	(10,132)

E. Opening cash position

Current account	21,574	31,038
Postcode lottery	6,603	6,603
Strong box donation	Nil	460
Savings account	17,797	18,001
Total	45,974	56,102

F. Closing cash position

Current account	31,038	20,902
Postcode lottery	6,603	6,603
Strong box donation	460	460
Savings account	18,001	18,005
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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 2022.

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

14 December 2022