



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 2022 - 31st July 2023

Our objectives and activities

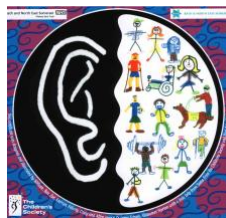
Established over forty years ago, Widcombe Acorns provides full day-care for up to 40 pre-school children, aged between 3 years and statutory school age during the 2022-23 academic year. We are open to all local children and their families regardless of their race, ethnicity, national origin or ability.

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 BDS Enhanced Disclosure clearance.

Our current trustees were appointed at our Annual General Meeting held on 7th November 2023. Daisy Lloyd was initially appointed as and acted as chair between November 2022 and January 2023, however resigned from the position in January 2023 due to personal reasons. Chris Henry was subsequently appointed as chair.

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Chris Henry - Chair
Kerry Swift - Secretary
Tanya Bennett – Health & Safety
Kerry Swift, Rebecca Colls - 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 2022-23

2022/23 has been another challenging year for Acorns. However, as always, the staff at Acorns have continued through adversity and provided an exceptional year for the children.

Staffing

The most significant change of the year is that Acorns has said goodbye to Dena Moore, Pre-school Leader after 25 years with Acorns and 15 as their leader. Dena has been instrumental over the years in making Acorns an exceptional pre-school environment for children. Dena will be sorely missed by staff, parents, and pupils alike.

Helen Harvey will be taking up the Pre-School Leader position and we wish her every success in her new role.

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.

Registrations

Acorns was full for Academic year 2022/23 with the exception of Fridays. 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

It's been a challenging year financially for Acorns. Although there was a good increase in income in 2023, there was also a substantial increase in our costs, partly due to the cost-of-living crisis, and partly due to a 50% increase in our annual rent and utilities. We also awarded a long-overdue pay increase to staff, the first pay award in many years.

The relationship with St Marks Community Centre has improved remarkably over the past year and progress has been made towards the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between our two organisations. This agreement will help both organisations align the mutual benefits each charity provides and is hoped will re-set the relationship between the two organisations, which has been prone to fracture in previous years.

Committee.

Acorns parents' committee chair stood down from her position unexpectedly just after Christmas, and I was appointed to replace her for the remainder of the academic year. The committee help to organise the usual Christmas, Easter and end of year celebration to the best of their ability but other than that, due to a limited amount of time in the year, other avenues and ideas initially posed by the committee were not fully explored. The ongoing negotiations on the MoU with SMCC also has taken more time than expected.

Acorns practice for the appointment of trustees is currently to re-appoint new trustees each academic year from the cohort of new pre-school parents. Whilst I am stepping down as a trustee, in line with usual practice, I ask that the newly appointed committee of trustee look

to change this practice. Appointing new trustees, with the required DBS and Ofsted checks takes time and resources – and at best newly appointed trustees are only operational in their roles for eight or nine months before they then step down. In order for a degree of continuity and to better safeguard a sustainable and prosperous future for the charity, I recommend that a handful Trustees should be appointed on multi-year terms, as this will allow trustees to work with Acorns staff to take better and more strategic long-term decisions.

Chris Henry
Chair, Acorns Committee

Pre-school leader's report

It is with a heavy heart that I write my last report for Widcombe Acorns. After lots of deliberation, my husband, Dan, and I have decided to move to France to try out a new way of life, hopefully learning to live more sustainably and to have more time to enjoy life and meet new challenges. I continue to champion Acorns and the incredible team that have not just kept her afloat through the huge amount of challenges that are thrown our way, but have continued to see her improve and progress.

I have had an amazing 25 years in Acorns. I will never forget what a wonderfully inspiring place it is. The team continue to strive for improvement, which means that the children continue to have incredible experiences that instil confidence and high self-esteem. They start school with the very best foundations in place, ready for the next stage of more formal learning. They leave us with the tools to cope with school, and minds that are ready for their next adventure. We always feel proud of the children's achievements.

Leading rehearsals for the shows, particularly the leaver's show, will be something I miss hugely. Seeing the difference in the children's confidence in their acting and dancing abilities between shows is always a particular highlight of my year. As always, this year's leaver's show was brilliant, if emotional for me. Hansel and Gretel set off through the forest to find the gingerbread house, on the way they met fierce crocodiles, little Miss Muffet and many spiders, Peter rabbit and a fly and three little monkeys. When they finally found the gingerbread house they met a particularly fierce witch! Luckily, they made friends, hugged and danced together! The children finished the show with an amazing routine to Crazy Frog (chosen from many songs by the children themselves I hastily add!). It was a brilliant end to the show, and every, single child joined in the routine, so emotional!

I truly believe that singing and dancing should be a regular part of every child's (and adults!) day. It lifts the spirit, giving freedom and fun to the day. I wish this was adopted by schools as a regular part of the day, every day!

The end of year party

I was (and still am) completely blown away by how many people came to the party to say goodbye. It was overwhelming and I didn't stop hugging and talking all night! We think there were approximately 300 - 400 people there, which is incredible and humbling. I met many children that I had cared for in Acorns over the past 25 years, the oldest that came to say goodbye is now 20 years old! Such an amazing experience! I was so happy to reunite with Bronia and Lucy, two ex-Acorns staff members who came along to surprise me, one all the way from Devon! There were so, so many parents and children to hug and I heard so many wonderful stories of their time with us, and how many parents feel that Acorns made a difference to their children's lives. It was an amazing experience and one I will never forget.

It makes me so proud to think of the Acorns community, it is huge, and warm and friendly and loving, and loyal.

Thank you to everyone who made the effort to come and say goodbye, it meant the world to me.

Our achievements this year

This year we have achieved many things. Our Forest School provision continues to improve and expand. We have such an incredibly talented forest school team, who work together beautifully to ensure every child is being encouraged to foster a love of outdoors. Our outside classroom (which has been cleaned, sanded and re-varnished this year) gives a base for warming up, cooking, singing, story telling and enjoying many different activities, ensuring that even reluctant forest school participants (usually due to the weather) can enjoy sessions. The outdoor provision has so many aspects to it. The team should feel so proud of what they have achieved. So many children now enjoy this incredible provision and I hope that continues forever.

We have a fabulous new gardener, Shannon, who has kept the garden beautifully for us this year. Thank you to him for stepping into the breach when our last gardener, Ian, retired, and best of luck to Ian for his future.

Challenges

There are, unfortunately, continuing concerns over funds in Acorns. The under-funding and the misleading wording (free!!!) of the early years entitlement by the Government continues. This has a knock-on effect on everything we try to do. The lack of money means we struggle to keep viable and we cannot give decent pay rises to the team, even though they absolutely deserve them. Recent rent and utility rises, plus the cost-of-living crisis, that has affected the price of food and resources, have made everything so much more difficult.

St Mark's negotiations

After an extremely challenging few years, I am relieved that the relationship seems to be on a more even keel with the trustees. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is still not ready to be signed due to new negotiations by the trustees to repurpose a room that is currently being used by Acorns for storage. This is worrying for Acorns as it may affect us being able to stay a secure unit, which is important to us. Unfortunately, I have not been able to see this through before leaving, however we have help through an Acorns parent, Chris Henry. He has kindly stayed on this year as a liaison between Acorns and St Marks.

What now for Acorns?

Acorns is the very best place for children to be in their pre-school year. The warm, fun, exciting environment and the incredibly talented staff team, mean that the children thrive with us. This will continue with the new leader, Helen. I have worked with Helen for many years, we share the same vision and I know that I am leaving Acorns in very safe hands.

Acorns biggest challenges are from the Government's refusal to listen to the sector, continuing to push the 'free' funding rhetoric, which is completely unsustainable for ALL early year's settings. This approach is frankly ridiculous and dangerous. We are hearing of more and more settings having to close because of this. I hope this changes soon.

The 'A' team!

This leads me to the team, the 'A' team as they are known! I wish Helen all the luck in the world with her new role as pre-school leader. She is incredible at her job and I know she will do everything to lead Acorns positively into the future. Best of luck Helen.

Helen has an incredible team to support her. Juliette, (my right-hand-woman!) will continue to be Acorns administrator and registration secretary, we could not be without her.

Tigi has stepped into the role of pre-school Deputy. Tigi's enthusiasm, passion, energy and organisational skills are second to none and I know she will continue to be hugely popular with children and team alike!

Hazel has stepped into the role of Senco, an incredibly important role. She is currently training for a level 3 Senco qualification in order to put everything she can into the role. I have worked closely with Hazel in the Senco role this year, and have no doubts whatsoever that she will be an excellent Senco and help many children and families going forward.

Sam and Emma are now joint Forest School leaders, supported by Hazel. This is a dream forest school team and they have made the provision the standard it is today. The time and effort they put into the forest school areas is incredible and they ensure the children's confidence in their own abilities continues to grow throughout the year.

Pip, Donna and Katie continue to support Helen and Tigi to keep ensuring the indoor provision is run to a high standard. This is no mean feat; you need to be a good all-rounder. You need to be amazing at cooking, telling inspiring stories, running sewing groups, soft-play groups, literacy activities, dancing, singing, signing, running creative sessions etc etc the list is never ending!

The team work so well because they can work cohesively, there is no hierarchy in Acorns. This means the children gain the highest quality experiences possible.

I wish the team every luck possible. I will miss you, please just keep doing what you do!

Dena Moore

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 two online raffles during the year and they continue to prove popular and raise more money than our old style paper raffles. The Christmas raffle raised an impressive £1,215.00 and the summer raffle raised £956.00.

The Christmas show and party went well with the usual soup, mince pies and mulled available to buy. The cake stall was stocked full of delicious homemade bakes from the parents and were quickly snapped up.

The summer party/leaving party for Dena was a huge success with 300 plus people in attendance. The bar ran smoothly and was way more efficiently run after the purchase of several card machines enabling easy card payments. With a live band, stalls, and hot street food available to purchase it all went extremely well and was very enjoyable, but also very emotional as we prepared to wave Dena off to her new life in France. It was wonderful to see so many ex-Acorns and their parents and even some former staff members too.

We managed to raise a reasonably healthy £3,697 (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 2022-23 with sessions filled apart from Fridays where only 16 of the morning sessions were sold and 15 of the afternoon sessions out of the 25 available. Friday occupancy remains an ongoing concern but we do reduce staffing accordingly.

Statistics for September 2022-23 intake

Total number of children allocated a place	33
Number of returning children (deferred school entry)	2
Number of siblings	10
Number carried over from previous year's waiting list	0
Number of new children	21

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 – 0, Monday 9am – 9, Monday 4pm – 3
Tuesday	8am – 5, Tuesday 9am – 11, Tuesday 4pm – 8
Wednesday	8am – 2, Wednesday 9am – 10, Wednesday 4pm – 4
Thursday	8am – 3, Thursday 9am – 9, Thursday 4pm – 3
Friday	8am – 0, Friday 9am – 7, Friday 4pm - 0

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 £196,767 in 2021-22 to **£225,760** in 2022-23. This is due in part to an increase in fees received, and 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.

Expenditure

Expenditure has increased from **£210,862** to **£232,689** this year. Staff wages and employment costs of £201,631 (this includes the cost of the staff pension) continue to make up the majority of this amount in overall expenditure. We also had to recruit two extra members of staff to help with several children with significant additional needs this year so this contributed significantly to this increase.

Fundraising efforts have contributed £7,078 of gross fundraising income with a net income of **£3,697**. 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 and has not been increased. 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 should be reviewed annually at management committee meetings. Unrestricted reserves (i.e the balance of the savings account) amount to £8,130.96. 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. The committee agreed to a slight increase in fees for the coming academic year to assist with the rise in cost of electricity and food and the increase in the minimum wage which took effect in April. Fees may need to be reviewed more frequently to ensure we remain financially viable however we are already at the more expensive end of the market and with the persisting misleading message from the government that childcare is 'free' leaves us very little scope to increase fees much further.

Juliette Davies
Administrator

Wishes for the coming year

- For the team to settle into their new roles
- To, hopefully, complete the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
- To welcome the new committee into their roles
- To continue to expand the forest school provision
- For Hazel to complete the Senco level 3 training
- For Tigi to complete her level 3 training
- For Emma to explore starting a PGCE at Bath Spa university
- To purchase a replacement strong box
- To purchase a replacement playhouse
- To continue to fight to keep Acorns open and a fantastic place for children and their families.

Widcombe Acorns Pre-school

Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31st July 2023

A. Pre-school

	Year Ending 31 July 2022	Year Ending 31 July 2023
Income £		
Early Years Entitlement	101,229	92,717
Fees received	94,543	120,280
Extra funding	740	12,309
Bank interest	4	126
Donations	251	328
Sub-total	196,767	225,760
Expenditure £		
All employment costs	185,434	201,631
Rent and utilities	9,560	15,113
Insurance	1,106	1,139
Education/training	475	409
Membership fees/subs	606	481
Cleaning	1,002	1,268
Educational resources	2,026	1,585
Office administration	3,224	2,197
Equipment/maintenance	2,056	1,908
Snacks	3,244	3,759
Garden	785	840
Sundries	1,344	2,359
Sub-total	210,862	232,689
Net pre-school income/ (expenditure)	(14,095)	(6,929)

B. Fundraising

Income	6,240	7,078
Expenditure	2,277	3,381
Net income from fundraising	3,963	3,697

C. Cash summary

Total income	203,007	232,838
Total expenditure	213,139	236,070
Net expenditure	(10,132)	(3,232)

D. Opening 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
Total	56,102	45,970

E. Closing cash position

Current account	20,902	17,544
Postcode lottery	6,603	6,603
Strong box donation	460	460
Savings account	18,505	18,131
Total	45,970	42,738
Net inflow/(outflow)	(10,132)	(3,232)

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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 2023.

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

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Dark Lane
Bathampton
BA2 6SZ

30 November 2023