



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

Registered Charity No: 1029494

Web site: www.widcombeacorns.co.uk

Widcombe Acorns Pre-school Annual Report

1st August 2023 - 31st July 2024

Our objectives and activities

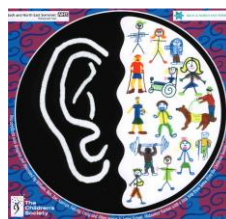
Established over forty years ago, Widcombe Acorns provides full day-care for up to 40 pre-school children, aged between 3 years and statutory school age during the academic year. We are open to all local children and their families regardless of their race, ethnicity, national origin or ability.

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

Historically our pre-school was managed by an annually elected voluntary committee made of parent trustees, who meet a minimum of six times a year. The purpose of the trustees 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 Leaders, 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 DBS Enhanced Disclosure clearance.

Our current trustees were appointed at our Annual General Meeting held on 7th November 2023.

Sarah James - Chair
Lou Gilliland - Secretary
Richard Heath – Health & Safety
Katherine Kajzer-Hughes
Christopher Henry

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 2023-24

As Chair of Widcombe Acorns Pre-school, I am delighted to reflect on what has been an incredibly dynamic and rewarding year for our community. This past year has brought exciting developments, meaningful achievements, and a renewed sense of purpose in delivering quality early years education.

One of the most notable changes has been the evolution of our leadership team, with over 20 years of dedicated service to Acorns and our broader community, Dena Moore made the decision to leave Acorns and embark on an exciting new chapter overseas. We are deeply grateful to Dena for her years of hard work and commitment — Acorns would not be what it is today without her contributions. With Dena's departure, we welcomed a new co-management structure led by Helen and Emma, whose combined experience and passion have already proven a great asset. Their collaborative approach ensures that both the day-to-day needs of our children and the wider strategic goals of Acorns are being met with care and vision.

Our outdoor learning has gone from strength to strength, with the expansion of our Forest School provision. The addition of a wildlife pond and a beautifully crafted wooden playhouse, generously donated by a local carpenter, have enriched our garden space, giving children greater opportunities to explore, discover and connect with nature.

We were also proud to collaborate with The Egg Theatre this year, bringing the magic of live performance to our children—an unforgettable experience that embodies our commitment to creativity and inclusion.

Financially, we have seen a strong recovery. I am thrilled to report a surplus of £40,770, a major turnaround from last year's deficit. This has been achieved through increased fee income, successful fundraising, and a careful review of our operational costs. These positive results give us a more secure foundation on which to build and reinvest in our provision.

However, we are not without our challenges. Recruitment remains difficult in the current climate, and the ongoing under funding in the Early Years sector and in SEN support poses ongoing concerns. Nevertheless, our dedicated staff and trustees continue to rise to the occasion, ensuring we remain a nurturing and inclusive environment for all children.

Our governance structure has also matured this year, with a more stable trustee base enabling long-term planning and continuity. Together with the St Mark's trustees, we have formalised a new Memorandum of Understanding, and are working constructively to address essential building repairs, particularly to the main roof.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to our core vision—offering a loving, engaging, and affordable pre-school experience for every child. With your continued support, we are confident in our ability to meet future challenges and celebrate many more successes.

Warmest thanks to our wonderful staff, supportive families, and dedicated trustees for making this year so special.

Sarah James

Chair of Trustees, Widcombe Acorns Pre-school

Pre-school leader's report

This year has been a busy positive year. Dena's moving on was an adjustment for the team, but the new team have hit the ground running. We have had some staffing structure changes; Emma is now sharing the management role with Helen. Emma has been working with the team for 4 years in forest school and the main room and has just finished a degree in Early Childhood Studies. The joint leadership is working very well with both Emma and Helen able to spend time with the children and leading the room as well as having time for administration. Acorns continues to have the warm buzzing and friendly feel for the children and staff.

Acorns Trustees

This year, we have shifted towards establishing a core group of trustees for Acorns who will serve for several years, rather than changing annually. This approach allows us to work more consistently and focus on long-term projects. Alongside this, we continue to form a parent fundraising committee each year to engage current parents. The new trustee structure has successfully assisted us with our discussions with St. Mark's, the new staffing structure and providing structure to our long term vision of providing affordable places for children who most need it.

Our achievements this year

This year we have achieved many things. We have continued to develop our forest school provision. As well as our wonderful wooden cabin and cared for forest school area, we have worked with the children to dig a pond for wildlife and we are very lucky to have a beautiful new wooden playhouse built by a local carpenter as a donation. Both new additions are helping us to enjoy the garden even more and get the most out of our outside learning time.

Furthermore, Acorns has teamed up with the Egg Theatre to enable children to go to the theatre thanks to the Wonder Fund of the Theatre Royal Bath. In December we took a group of excited children to see The Snow Mouse, this was a magical and memorable experience. We hope to take a second group later in the year to enable all children to participate.

We have painted our front door and hope to paint the inside of Acorns later this year.

Challenges

This year we have found covering staff sickness and recruiting new staff a challenge. We were lucky to appoint a supply member of staff in September. However, they have since been given a permanent position elsewhere which has often meant staff have been stretched and have had to work overtime. We suspect the difficulty in recruitment is largely due to government funding being far from adequate to pay staff a fair wage for their hard work. This is a national issue which many other settings are experiencing. We are continuing to recruit supply staff for the year ahead.

St Mark's Discussions

This year the St Mark's trustees and Acorns trustees have been working together to finalise the details of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which has now been signed by all parties. St Mark's Community Centre owns the building that Acorns leases.

The MOU is meant to show a shared intention between both parties to work together more closely — especially to improve communication and find common ground on how the shared spaces and resources at St Mark's are used. Some leaking inside of the main hall and Acorns room from the main roof of the community centre has highlighted the urgent need for repairs to the roof. St Mark's Trustees are currently working towards fundraising for this project. In the meantime our trustees are negotiating a survey of the roof to ensure safety for all inside the building. Initial surveys have suggested that the building is safe.

Our plans for the year ahead

This year we hope to purchase some much-needed resources including new chairs for the children and a new water tray. We have continued with the fantastic Acorns curriculum giving children the chance to develop and grow in a nurturing and engaging environment. We have always ensured that children can explore open ended resources which encourage creativity, independence and engagement.

The 'A' team!

As well as our new management team we have a few new additions and changes...

Our deputy Tigi has just completed her level 3 in Child development and has continued to be a strong and influential member of the team throughout the year.

We have been incredibly fortunate to have gained an incredibly experienced addition to our team with Lauren starting with us in September. Lauren is a qualified teacher who has moved here from London, having thirteen years' experience teaching children with Special Educational Needs. Lauren has settled in well and is sharing her vast SEND knowledge with the team.

Hazel has taken on her role as Special Educational Needs Coordinator brilliantly and has completed her level 3 SENco qualification. Hazel has led the team in supporting children to enable every child to access their Acorns provision and reach their potential.

Sam has continued to lead the Forest School team, taking inspiration from the changing seasons and our outdoor environment, resulting in inspiring and informative forest school sessions for all.

We are also thrilled that the rest of our fabulous team including Donna and Pip have remained committed to their integral roles as pre-school practitioners, both offering a warm, nurturing approach to all the children.

Emma Dodds-Smith and Helen Harvey **Pre-school Leaders**

Registration Report

Occupancy Overview

Occupancy levels saw a modest decrease this year, primarily due to a lower birth rate within the local area and an increased number of children with additional needs, requiring higher staff-to-child ratios. In some sessions, capacity was intentionally limited to ensure the best care. Friday occupancy continues to be a challenge, but we have adapted by scaling staff presence accordingly.

September 2023 Intake: Key Figures

Admission Category	Total
Children allocated a place	33
Returning children (deferred school entry)	0
Siblings of current/former attendees	7
Children from previous year's waiting list	0
New admissions	26

Extended Hours Provision

This year marks the fourth consecutive year offering both early start and late finish options. The Breakfast Club (8:15 AM start) and Extended Day (until 4:00 PM) continue to provide flexible solutions for families. Attendance varies by day, as shown below:

Day	8:15 AM Start	9:00 AM Start	4:00 PM Finish
Monday	3	9	7
Tuesday	3	13	12
Wednesday	4	11	10
Thursday	4	9	9
Friday	3	9	7

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 advice and expert number crunching. We couldn't do it without you!

Summary and key observations:

1. Income and Expenditure Analysis

- Total Income increased from **£232,838** (2023) to **£255,499** (2024), mainly due to a rise in fees received (£145,925 vs. £120,280) and fundraising income (£11,097 vs. £7,078).
- Early Years Entitlement funding decreased from **£92,717** to **£88,071**.
- Extra funding for SEN also fell from **£12,309** to **£9,409**.
- Total Expenditure decreased from **£236,070** to **£217,429**, primarily due to lower employment costs (£182,742 vs. £201,631) and reduced spending on sundries (£1,379 vs. £2,359) and cleaning (£561 vs. £1,268).
- **Net surplus for 2024: £40,770**, compared to a **deficit of £3,232** in 2023.

2. Fundraising Performance

- Fundraising income increased significantly from **£7,078** to **£11,097**.
- Fundraising expenditure reduced slightly from **£3,381** to **£2,462**.
- Net fundraising income nearly doubled, from **£3,697** to **£8,635**.

3. Cash Position

- Closing cash balance increased from **£42,738** (2023) to **£83,508** (2024), mainly due to the improved net income.
- Current account balance grew significantly to **£55,727** (from £17,544).
- Savings account saw a small increase from **£18,131** to **£18,478**.

Key Takeaways

- Strong financial turnaround with a £40,770 surplus compared to last year's deficit.
- Increased fee income & fundraising success contributed significantly.
- Reduced employment costs helped improve financial performance.
- Early Years Entitlement & extra funding have decreased, which could impact future budgets.

Some cost areas increased, remedial therapy such as speech and language therapy (£1,480) and office admin/tech support (£2,588).

The preschool has seen a strong financial recovery over the course of the year, with a **£40,770 surplus** compared to last year's **£3,232 deficit**. Below is a more detailed analysis, along with some budget recommendations to sustain and improve financial health.

Key Areas of Financial Improvement

Increased Fee Income:

- Fees received increased from **£120,280** to **£145,925 (+£25,645, up 21%)** due to a significant fee increase agreed in the summer term of 2023
- This suggests higher enrolment or increased fee rates, which is a positive sign.

Successful Fundraising:

- Net fundraising income more than doubled (£3,697 → £8,635).
- If this trend continues, it can provide additional funds for special projects or reserves.

Reduced Employment Costs:

- Salaries and staff costs decreased from **£201,631 to £182,742 (-£18,889, down 9%)**.
- Resulting from: Staff restructuring after Dena left with more job sharing.
- However, it's important to ensure that cost-cutting does not affect staff morale or service quality.

Lower Overall Expenditure:

- Spending dropped from **£236,070 to £217,429 (-£18,641)**, largely due to:

- Cleaning costs down by **56%** (£1,268 → £561).
- Sundries down by **42%** (£2,359 → £1,379).
- Employment costs down by **9%** (£201,631 → £182,742).

2. Areas of Concern & Recommendations

Decreased Government Funding:

- Early Years Entitlement fell by £4,646 (-5%). This has been offset by an increase in non funded session income.
- Extra funding (SEN) dropped by £2,900 (-24%).

Higher Spending in Some Areas:

- Remedial Therapy (speech and language therapy): New expense of £1,480.
- Office Admin & Tech Support: Increased by 18% (£2,197 → £2,588).
- Educational Resources: Increased by 25% (£1,585 → £1,975).

Recommendation:

- Remedial Therapy: Ensure funding is available for this important service. This was funded by BANES via the SEN payment for the child but must be paid for upfront by Acorns.
- Admin/Tech Support: Assess whether this spending is necessary or if cheaper alternatives exist.
- Educational Resources: While an increase is positive, ensure funds are spent effectively.

3. Cash Flow & Reserves

Closing cash balance improved significantly:

- **£83,508 vs. £42,738 last year (a 95% increase).**
- Current account balance increased to **£55,727** (from £17,544).
- Savings account slightly increased to **£18,478** (from £18,131) due to increasing interest rates on saving accounts over the year.

Recommendation:

- Consider allocating some of this surplus into the reserves fund for unexpected expenses, future expansion or forced closure.
- Ensure at least **3-6 months of operating expenses** are kept as reserves (~£54,000 based on current expenditure levels).

4. Suggested Budget Priorities for 2024-25

Category	Recommendation
Staff Costs	Maintain efficiency but ensure staff retention & morale.
Fundraising	Continue successful efforts, consider grant applications, sponsorship deals, charitable donations.
Educational Resources	Ensure investments directly benefit children's learning.
Tech/ Admin costs	Review necessity of spending, find cost-effective solutions.
Cash Reserves	Set aside surplus funds for long-term sustainability.

Final Thoughts

- The preschool is in a much stronger financial position than last year.
- The focus should now be on sustaining fee income and maintaining cost control. Maximum occupancy being the ultimate goal. Increasing occupancy in breakfast clubs, early starts and late finishes.
- With a £40,770 surplus, there is room to invest in quality improvements while ensuring financial stability.

Widcombe Acorns Pre-school

Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31st July 2024

A. Pre-school

	Year Ending 31 July 2023	Year Ending 31 July 2024
Income £		
Early Years Entitlement	92,717	88,071
Fees received	120,280	145,925
Extra funding	12,309	9,409
Bank interest	126	347
Donations	328	650
Sub-total	225,760	244,402
Expenditure £		
All employment costs	201,631	182,742
Rent and utilities	15,113	15,990
Remedial therapy	0	1,480
Insurance	1,139	1,342
Education/training	409	557
Membership fees/subs	481	610
Cleaning	1,268	561
Educational resources	1,585	1,975
Office admin/tech support	2,197	2,588
Equipment/maintenance	1,908	1,569
Snacks	3,759	3,575
Garden	840	599
Sundries	2,359	1,379
Sub-total	232,689	214,967
Net pre-school income/ (expenditure)	(6,929)	29,435

B. Fundraising

Income	7,078	11,097
Expenditure	3,381	2,462
Net income from fundraising	3,697	8,635

C. Cash summary

Total income	232,838	255,499
Registration fees in	0	2,700
Total expenditure	236,070	217,429
Net income/(expenditure)	(3,232)	40,770

D. Opening cash position

Current account	20,902	17,544
Postcode lottery	6,603	6,603
Strong box donation	460	460
Savings account	18,005	18,131
Total	45,970	42,738

E. Closing cash position

Current account	17,544	55,727
Postcode lottery	6,603	6,603
Strong box donation	460	0
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Total	42,738	83,508
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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 2024.

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

29 November 2024