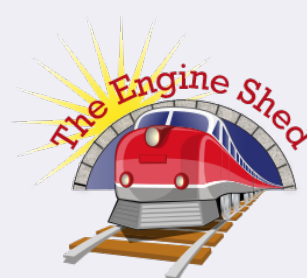




# THE ENGINE SHED

## ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

Registered Charity No. **1187504**



**The Engine Shed**

31 Grove Hill Reading, RG4 8PN | [www.theengineshed.org.uk](http://www.theengineshed.org.uk)



# ABOUT THE ENGINE SHED

The Engine Shed is a special interest group for autistic children, young people and adults which was set up over fourteen years ago and is run by volunteers. The group was set up by parents and carers in response to the lack of welcoming and supportive recreational facilities for our autistic children and the profound isolation that autistic children and their family members were facing as result of this. We run regular train play sessions in halls, organise days out at railway-themed attractions and also run sibling activities and parent information sessions and training. We are one of the '10 Best UK Rail Adventures for Children' (Telegraph 2018).

## CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

---

This year has seen an expansion in our activities and the culmination of our campaign to purchase to purchase a mini-bus/van to support our work. We have added another Engine Shed group in Bromley, initiated by volunteer Michael Stotter-Chambers which has been very popular indeed. After two years of fundraising we purchased a van/mini-bus which will allow us to transport trains and run play sessions at multiple venues as pop-up events and to take members on days out to railway attractions.

In December our delayed trip for 40 people on the Polar Express took place (cancelled due to Covid in 2021). This was a truly magical experience that we were glad to make available to our members, with the support of our funders. We had other great days out to railway attractions in the year including to The Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway, and to High Wycombe Model Engineering Club.

We have been lucky to receive grants from local and national funders this year for our work, enabling us to buy the vehicle and to run the groups in three localities. As we approached the year end we were offered the possibility of moving our trains and the accompanying layouts into an industrial unit where they can be set up throughout the month, enabling us to run sessions for early years, for multiple age ranges as well as youth and adults clubs. This is the vision and the project for the rest of 2023 and 2024 as we seek to create a permanent and sustainable home and base for The Engine Shed.

None of this community-based train-related fun would take place without the support and enthusiasm of our many volunteers. As well as the behind the scenes preparation (social media, funding applications etc), there is lots of heavy lifting, detailed electrical work and non-stop tea-making that goes into running our sessions week after week. We are very grateful to everyone involved.

**Sarah Snow,**  
Chair



# TRAIN PLAY SESSIONS IN THE COMMUNITY

After visiting the Reading Engine Shed in May of 2022, Michael Stotter-Chambers asked if he could set up an Engine Shed group in Bromley where he lives. We worked on this over the summer of 2022, securing donated trains and driving over an unused small Hornby layout from the Reading group. The new Bromley group started in October 2022, meeting in a scout hut and immediately creating a community of train enthusiasts. We are delighted to have this new group, led by a young autistic person who has experience of supporting autistic children as a Teaching Assistant in a primary school. Michael also attends the Reading and Chingford groups to volunteer when he can, linking all our groups together.



*Michael who leads the Bromley Engine Shed group*



## Play session at the Chingford group

Our train play sessions in Reading and Chingford this year have continued to provide opportunities for inclusive play and interaction. We have welcomed lots of new families along, many of whom are on the pathway to a diagnosis

appointment and are struggling to find suitable activities in the community. We want to ensure that they can benefit from a full range of activities at this early stage of the journey.





## TRAIN-THEMED DAYS OUT

We enjoyed a number of train days out this year, including to the wonderful Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway (in our new mini-bus). We had a lovely time in August at the High Wycombe Model Engineering Club, who once again put on their annual summer fun day for us. We are grateful to the local Freemasons for organising this event, and funding lunch and cake, and the team at HWMEC for their hospitality. This is the eighth year that this event has been put on for us.

The days out provide opportunities for further interaction and bonding. Our trip for 40 people on the Polar Express took place in December and did not disappoint – it was a theatrical performance on the train: we danced, we sang and drank hot chocolate.



We were lucky to have another visit to Fawley Hill in August, the private estate of the late Sir William McAlpine and Lady McAlpine in the heart of the English countryside which has its own full size railway line and trains. With its collection of rescued animals along with the rescued trains and railway memorabilia, the Estate is always a favourite with our members. We are grateful to the team at the Museum who make every effort to ensure that all members of our group can get the most out of the visit.

# PURCHASE OF VEHICLE

---

We had wanted to buy our own van for lots of reasons: our long-term volunteer in Reading was holding onto his old van just for transporting our train layouts and it was becoming very unreliable. We also wanted to meet the demand for additional play sessions across the region. We receive lots of enquiries about bringing trains to community events and special schools but require the flexibility of our own vehicle to do this. Our own vehicle would enable us to take the train resources into the community and to deliver pop-up Engine Shed groups, meeting regularly and bringing autistic children and young people, their parents and carers and older volunteers together.

Linked to the van purchase, we want to develop a formal volunteer programme for our adult group members as part of this process. This will provide further volunteering, apprentice and possibly employment opportunities for members of the

group - whilst delivering an extensive programme of community train sessions for autistic children and young people across the region.

After two years of fundraising we were successful in raising enough funds to secure the vehicle. We are grateful to our funders which include The Shanly Foundation, The Baily Thomas Trust, The John Sykes Foundation, The Earley Charity, Awards for All and others. We were touched to receive an In Memoriam donation from the family of Irvine Cresswell who loved trains and has autistic grandchildren. Thank you to everyone who supported this initiative.

We wasted no time in having a day out to Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway in the mini-bus in March 2023. The vehicle allowed us to give lifts to families who do not have cars, increasing access to our railway days out. We have also been able to offer the use of the vehicle to local charities who have used it for taking refugee families out for the day, transporting donated goods for an environmental charity and other initiatives.







## A HOME FOR THE ENGINE SHED IN READING

During the year we were offered the possibility of moving our trains and the accompanying layouts into an industrial unit where they can be set up throughout the month, enabling us to run sessions for early years, for multiple age ranges as well as delivering youth and adult clubs. We are now working on creating a permanent and sustainable home and base for The Engine Shed.

Some young people have been put off joining a group that is attended by young children. The 13-17 year olds who attend The Engine Shed gain hugely from the group – many find school life and friendships challenging and the safe space provided by the Engine Shed is valued. This group particularly often experience a range of mental health problems and are at risk of isolation and loneliness. A youth group for this age range would be a valuable addition to The Engine Shed activities.

The new permanent space can provide further recreational and also volunteering opportunities for our adult members. With volunteers in place, adult members can attend during the day and find community and activity. Newly-diagnosed early years children have particular needs, and their parents are looking for support at the start of their journey. Having our own space, open and staffed by volunteers, will enable us to offer sessions all week, for different age groups, where we can also deliver other activities and forms of support for children, young people, and parents/carers.

---

## SUSTAINING OUR ACTIVITIES

---

The Engine Shed is committed to accessibility. We have always sought to remove obstacles to individuals and families attending Engine Shed sessions – you do not need to book, you do not pay, refreshments are free. There are now a number of toy train-related activity schemes which are charging £12-£13 for a two-hour session. If you have 3 children like many of our attendees do, this equates to £35+ for two hours of playing with trains in a local hall. This is beyond the reach of many of the people who would benefit from the club's activities. During a financial crisis it is more important than ever that we keep sessions

free of charge. In addition, booking online in advance does not always work well for families who are taking one day at a time depending on the needs of the child or young person.

We remain committed to this no-cost / no-fuss model which is part of The Engine Shed's success. We fundraise on an ongoing basis to keep the activities free of charge to our attendees. Trustees will continue to explore funding opportunities this year, and we will also join the Charity Winter Draw in Reading again, selling raffle tickets to support our work. We would love to hear from anyone who would like to run a marathon, hold a cake sale or organise a fundraising event for The Engine Shed. We can help with publicity, materials and other support required.

# The Engine Shed

Year ended 31st March 2023

	2023 Restricted	2023 Unrestricted	2023 Total	2022 comparison
<b>Income</b>				
Grants received:				
Lottery & IKEA	-		-	4,332.00
Berks Community Foundation	1,500.00		1,500.00	-
Arnold Clark Foundation	-		-	750.00
Four Barrows Foundation	2,200.00		2,200.00	-
Good Exchange	1,550.00		1,550.00	2,000.00
Baily Thomas Trust	3,000.00		3,000.00	-
St Laurence Relief in Need	2,000.00		2,000.00	-
Reading Borough Council	-		-	2,580.00
Mobbs Memorial Trust	-		-	3,000.00
Shanly Foundation	-		-	2,500.00
John Sykes Foundation	-		-	1,000.00
Souter Charitable Trust	-		-	2,000.00
Local Giving	500.00		500.00	-
Earley Charity	5,000.00		5,000.00	-
Awards For All	9,950.00		9,950.00	-
Misc donations		4,592.28	4,592.28	389.96
Other income				
Total income	25,700.00	4,592.28	30,292.28	18,551.96
<b>Expenditure</b>				
Venue Hire and Office rent	9,643.82	4,050.00	13,693.82	7,710.55
Minibus and related costs	29,003.21		29,003.21	-
Utilities	0.00		0.00	-
Equipment	249.87		249.87	764.52
Days Out	968.76		968.76	-
Activity & carer packs		140.9	140.90	182.89
Excursions & other activities			0.00	2,355.75
Volunteer expenses	573.24		573.24	665.08
Refreshments	808.24		808.24	343.88
Website, promotional mats etc	216.00		216.00	288.00
Train and Book resources	251.62		251.62	-
Parent & carer activities	0.00		0.00	319.62
Insurance	298.56		298.56	298.56
Fees, misc expenses, running costs		374.56	374.56	3,980.80
other expenditure				
Total expenditure	42,013.32	4,565.46	46,578.78	16,909.65
Total Income less Total Expenditure	(16,313.32)	26.82	(16,286.50)	1,642.31
Opening bank balance	18,618.35	1,412.44	20,030.79	18,388.48
Surplus/(loss) from above	(16,313.32)	26.82	(16,286.50)	1,642.31
Closing bank balance	2,305.03	1,439.26	3,744.29	20,030.79

**The Engine Shed**  
**Year ended 31st March 2023**

**Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2023**

	£	
Current Assets	26,500	Mini-Bus
Debtors	0	
Cash at Bank	3,744.29	
Total current assets	30,244.29	

Current Liabilities	
Creditors	0
Total Net Assets	30,244.29

Funds	0.00
-------	------

Signed 

Sarah Snow, Chair of Trustees

Signed 

J. Lawrence, Independent Examiner