

Dee Street Playgroup
Annual Report 2023 – 2024
(1974 – 2024)

Well, we made it! 50 years of Dee Street Playgroup. How many times over the last 50 years did we think we would be closing our doors for the last time, due to lack of accommodation, lack of funding, world pandemics, and yet here we are, still going strong. What an incredible achievement. When I sat down to write this year's report and truly reflected on this momentous milestone, I was very proud and rightly so, of our dedicated management team, staff team and committee members. What Dee Street Playgroup has accomplished over the last 50 years is amazing, to think back to 1974 and the humble beginnings when a few local mothers realised the need for child provision, and to meet that need and carry that forward, through the Troubles and beyond, and for the playgroup to be still thriving today 5 decades later, what a triumph, what a victory for local people to make such a difference to the lives of families in their community. I would just like to take a minute to thank Sam McCready, off all the people in this room today, Sam has been at the helm of this project from the very beginning. His dedication, commitment, knowledge, leadership and the service he has given voluntarily to this project and community for the last 50 years have been outstanding, and I think we have been very very fortunate indeed to have him. He has worn two hats serving as both secretary and treasurer for many years and has guided us through the good times and the bad and multiple funding applications, without which we couldn't possibly have survived. So, a very big heartfelt thank you to Sam.

We celebrated our 50th anniversary with a family fun day right here in Dee Street Community centre the home of the playgroup. We had a fabulous day with entertainment from Party Dee Jay NI and a face painter for the children, followed by a wonderful buffet lunch. The highlight of our day was a visit from the Lord Lieutenant, Dame Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle, who brought the greetings of King Charles to Dee Street.

We welcomed past and present pupils, staff, funders and many friends of Dee Street, and had a fantastic time reminiscing about our wonderful playgroup. Many thanks to all of the committee and council staff (and Sam's wife Anne) who worked tirelessly behind the scenes, setting up, serving and cleaning up, it truly was a day to remember.

The 2023- 2024 year saw 16 local children avail of our playgroup services. Of these 16 we had 2 direct referrals from social services, 3 with development delays of varying nature. 4 with extremely poor speech and 5 who were not toilet trained until well into the

school year. These figures alone just go to show how very real the need for our services are in this community. The playgroup staff worked tirelessly to identify the many needs of the children and to develop a teaching strategy to support the individual needs of the children, whilst also supporting and signposting their parents to the appropriate agencies. Throughout the year we worked alongside social services, health visitors and speech therapists, implementing early intervention strategies. I am pleased to report through a consistent approach with lots of encouragement we managed to have all the children toilet trained by Easter and have witnessed small gradual improvements to the concentration levels and social behaviours and speech of the other children. We continue to provide monthly monitoring reports to BHSCT for the children referred to our services.

We had a very full, fun and busy playgroup year, including weekly Kimberdance sessions, cookery, craft, breakfast with Santa, Easter egg hunts, Baby Raves, Mini Movers, stay and play days, parental workshops, dental team visits, all packed into the last ten months.

We send out parental questionnaires every year to gain feedback from parents about our services and are delighted to report all our parents provided very positive feedback praising the staff team and our services.

Fundraising

We received donations this year from

Energy Store

Deans sit out St Annes Cathedral

James Brown Community fund

Welders social club

We are very grateful for the support of our funders.

We received two beautiful bookcases this year in memory of Sandra Workman, they take pride of place in our story corner, and we are forever grateful to the Workman family for this special gift.

Staff Training and Development

Staff continue to seek out relevant training for personal development and the promotion of high standards within the playgroup. This year's training included:

Making good funding applications

Effectively managing complaints

Working in partnership with parents

Safeguarding

BHSCT Inspection

Our annual Trust inspection took place in November 2023 having been postponed from May. We are delighted to report the inspecting social worker Mrs Nuala Lavery , had high praise for the playgroup and congratulated us on our 50th anniversary. There were no outstanding requirements to be met, just a recommendation to look at relief staff cover for staff absences.

Pathway Grant

We were notified in March this year that we would be receiving the Pathway grant for the financial year 2024 – 2025. All deliverables have so far been met and all monitoring for this grant is currently up to date.

BHSCT Grant

We have had our annual pre assurance meeting with Belfast Health and Social care trust and have received word they will be continuing with their 2 referred/funded places this year.

Early Years

Early years is embarking on a research project to take place over the next six months. The research will be carried out through surveys, focus groups and interviews with early years settings and stakeholders overseen by an advisory group. The purpose of the research is to understand the current situation, uncover the strengths and weakness and identify support that can underpin the critical work of community and voluntary settings. As a playgroup we have already completed the survey and will be attending a focus group on the 26th of June.

Staff and Committee, Council workers

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank our staff , Mrs Lindsay Fulton, we were reduced to a team of 2 this year and you took on the challenge energetically and enthusiastically with your endless patience and kindness your hard work hasn't gone unnoticed. Mrs Lana McCandless you thought you were retiring! Thankyou for your continued support helping with our staff absentee cover, we really truly couldn't manage without you, it's great to know the playgroup is in such safe hands when a member of staff needs time off. To all the committee members Sam, Deborah, Roseann, William , Gary, Lana, thank you for your time, for your unwavering support and contribution to the

running of the playgroup, without you there would be no playgroup. To the council staff Liam , Jackie and Iggy thank you for continuing to make this centre such a welcoming space for all our playgroup families, for your help every day setting up and cleaning up , for your support on our 50th anniversary celebrations we couldn't have managed without you. Anthony and Matthew thank you for sharing your resources with playgroup, for funding our Breakfast with Santa, the baby raves, mini mover sessions , face painters and the bus for our outing we appreciate your generosity from what we know to be a very tight budget.

Debbie Weir

Playgroup Manager. 19th June 2024