

Cloughmills Early Years Chairperson AGM report 2023/2024 submitted by Karen Forsythe

The 23/24 year in playgroup was a busy one. We began the year with our AGM in September where our committee was voted on. Our outgoing Chairperson Abigail Loughridge stepped down from her role and Aimee Logan was elected as Chair in her place. Sarah McNeill was re-elected as Secretary and Karen Forsythe was elected as Treasurer.

Of our committee members, Laura McFaul and Julie-Anne Alexander stepped down and Pamela Forsythe, Kathryn Forsythe and Hannah Heffron took up additional committee member posts.

We thank Abigail and all our outgoing committee members for their time and dedication to their roles and for everything they have done for the playgroup.

With the new committee elected, our first task was to organise our Halloween fundraiser at the Mill. A fantastic afternoon was organised with crafts, pumpkin painting, fancy dress competition, chocolate apple making and soft play and we managed to raise a fantastic total of £1,100.

In November we welcomed our new Leader Jill to playgroup and were delighted to have her join us after some time without a permanent leader. Jill has proved to be a fantastic addition to the Cloughmills Early Years team. We held some further fundraisers in December including a Christmas Hamper fundraiser which raised £573 and a Christmas disco for the school children in the Primary School hall.

Unfortunately due to cuts, we had to say goodbye to Diane at the end of December and we genuinely wish her all the best and thank her for everything she has done for the playgroup over the years.

After a much needed Christmas break, we received the fantastic news that we had secured a grant of £5,000 from Halifax which was received in January 24. We also set about planning our February table quiz and raffle fundraiser. The evening was a brilliant success with a full house in Pattons of Cloughmills and we raised a fantastic total of £1,060.

February also saw some committee changes with Aimee Logan stepping down as Chairperson. Karen Forsythe took up the Chairperson post and Hannah Heffron stepped into the Treasurer role.

In March we sadly said goodbye to Lizzie as she moved on to a new role and again, we thank her for everything she has done for playgroup over the years.

March proved to be a challenging month as we had to close for 2 weeks due to staff sickness but we were all glad to get back to routine at the start of April. We also received the news in April that we would be entering the in-store vote for the Tesco Stronger Starts grant scheme. Voting was held in 4 local Tesco stores from April to June and we were delighted when we heard that we had won the vote, securing a grant of £1,450 to be spent on outdoor play resources.

Our final fundraiser of the year was our raffle to win a £250 Ballymena Means voucher and we raised £820 through ticket sales. Our committee and staff also attended the Spring Fair at the Mill where we did crafts with the children and sold some raffle tickets too. I would like to thank everyone at the Mill and within the Cloughmills Community Action Team for their support throughout the year and for allowing us to use their meeting rooms for committee meetings. They have also provided us with fresh fruit and break snacks throughout the year when items became available through the community fridge. Again, we thank them for their donations and support.

The year came to a close with an end of term party where it was also sadly communicated that Elaine would be leaving after 22 years service. We thank Elaine for everything she has done for the playgroup and wish her well for the future.

Over the summer months there was little time for rest – Mr Crabbe, the Principal of Cloughmills Primary School came on board the playgroup team and he and Jill (with some committee input) worked tirelessly over the summer to give the playgroup a much needed revamp. New paint on the walls, new blinds and new furniture were all put in place and I think you'll all agree the place is looking absolutely fantastic right now and is such a great space for our children.

We finished off the summer months on a high when we recruited our 2 fabulous new members of staff, Kirsty and Clodagh. I think you'll all agree that we have a brilliant team here and I'm excited to see what we can achieve in the year ahead.