

Cloughmills Early Years Chairperson AGM Report 2024/25 submitted by Karen Forsythe

The year to August 2025 was one filled with achievement and success for Cloughmills Early Years. We started the year with a brand-new team, with 2 new staff members joining Jill in September 2024: Kirsty as Deputy Leader and Clodagh as assistant. The new team very quickly gelled and together they brought many new ideas and improvements to the playgroup.

We introduced tax free childcare for parents at the start of the year by enrolling ourselves as a provider - this allows parents to save up to 32% of their preschool or pre-pre fees. We had, and continue to have a good uptake for this scheme.

Our fundraising began in October 24 when committee and staff held a bucket collection at Tesco Ballymena and raised a fantastic £322 in one morning.

Our AGM was held on Tuesday 19th November 24 and our guest Chair for the evening was Mr Crabbe, Principal of Cloughmills Primary School. Mr Crabbe and the school have been an immense support to the playgroup, the past year in particular and they helped us to completely revamp the playgroup in the summer of 2024. I would like to thank Mr Crabbe and the school for their ongoing and continued support.

At the AGM, our Treasurer Hannah Heffron stepped down from her role and Pamela Forsythe was appointed as Treasurer. Two new committee members were also elected: Louise Gorvin and Kym McCambridge. The rest of the committee was re-elected as in the prior year.

With the election of our committee complete, we set about organising a Christmas fundraiser which was a joint Christmas Hamper with Cloughmills Primary School. Together we raised £1,186 with half the proceeds going to Cloughmills Early Years. We were also delighted to learn that Cloughmills Carol Singers chose us as one of their causes to receive a share of their takings after braving a very cold evening of singing around the village. We are very grateful to Cloughmills Carol singers for choosing us as one of the beneficiaries and they raised an amazing £515 for the playgroup.

In January, sadly we learned that our assistant Clodagh was moving on to another role, however very soon after, we gladly welcomed Vicki to the team.

Our first fundraiser of the new year was a quiz held on 7th March in Pattons Bar, Cloughmills. We also held a raffle on the night and raised a fantastic total of £650.

There was barely time to settle before our ETI inspection, the last of which we had in 2015. The inspection took place on 20th March and we received an absolutely fantastic report. This is a huge credit to all the work put in by our staff, who put an immense amount of time and effort into preparations for the inspection. I would like to thank the staff for all their hardwork, not just for the inspection but throughout the year - playgroup is a fantastic environment for our children because of all the work that you do.

From one inspection to the next, our annual Social Services Inspection took place on 6th May and again we received a fantastic report and feedback.

In May we also received the news that we would be one of the recipients of the Pathway Fund grant. This has allowed us to extend our opening hours for preschool children, in line with the

government plans for pre-school standardisation which will be rolled out over the next couple of years.

Our final fundraiser of the year was our year end raffle which raised an amazing £1,343. A huge thankyou to all parents and friends who donated prizes for the raffle - we had some fantastic prizes.

This brought a very busy and successful year to a close. I would like to again thank all staff for their dedication to Cloughmills Early Years and providing a safe, nurturing environment for our children in the first leg of their educational journey.

I would also like to thank the Committee members for their dedication and support throughout the year. There are a number of Committee members stepping down tonight who have been on the Committee for a few years and who stayed on the Committee to see us through a particularly difficult period of change and reform in the first half of 2024. Thankfully I feel we are now out the other side and I honestly couldn't have coped without the dedication and support of the committee who always showed up and came together to face any challenge which came our way. So thankyou to the outgoing committee members and also those who are staying on for another year.

That brings my Chairpersons report to a close so thankyou for listening.