

Chairperson's Report

Firstly, I'd like to welcome you all here to Kiddies Castle's AGM for the 2023-2024 year. And thank you for taking the time to come along, it's much appreciated by the entire Kiddies Castle Team.

This year saw a lot of change on both the committee and staffing front. And I'd like to thank Ann Dixon for helping us navigate our way through these changes.

The previous committee decided to step down at last years AGM as their children had moved on from Kiddies Castle and felt the time was right to move on. I'd like to personally thank Sarah Lavery, the previous Chairperson. Sarah was an incredible help during the transition process, which due to the struggles with the banking system, lasted much longer than anyone expected. She was a great source of information and was always available to help.

Despite not being able to get a new committee formed during last years AGM, there were enough willing and able people to join the committee when an EGM was held a few weeks later. I took on the role of Chairperson and luckily for me, the other committee members were great people who were willing to do whatever was required to help. So a huge thank you to them for all their efforts.

On the staffing side of things, we were really disappointed to lose our previous Leader, Paul O'Donnell, and Deputy Leader, Rachel Hurl, who both opted to explore a different career path. Both Paul and Rachel were extremely well thought of by parents, children and the rest of the team and we wish them well in their future endeavours.

On a more positive note, we have a new staff team who have made a great start. Maeve McGill has taken over as Leader and Niamh Wilson has taken over as Deputy Leader. It's great to see their enthusiasm for their jobs, the ideas that they have and I've no doubt they'll ensure Kiddies Castle continues to be a success. Yvonne Cleary has also moved up to Early Years Assistant and is undertaking her Level 3 at present. Bringing Yvonne into this role was a very easy decision – she knows Kiddies Castle really well and the children love her. And not to forget Mary Holgate, who knows Kiddies Castle better than anyone. Mary has been a great sounding board for us as a committee and for the new staff as they get familiar with the setting. She has really helped the transition this year and I'm very grateful to her for that.

As with all charities, funding is one the main concerns and it's something that we as a committee have spent a lot of time trying to address. Andy will go through the detail but as I'm sure you will expect, we rely hugely on grants and the generosity of people and businesses. When we arrange our sponsored walk or Christmas raffle, it's not lost on us that the onus falls to the parents to help raise the money and I'd just like to thank everyone for any donations that have been made. It literally is a case of every penny counts. We have

some plans for a large fundraising project which, for anyone lucky enough to join the committee, will kick off in Q1 next year.

In terms of the setting itself, the new year has obviously started, and the staff are getting more and more familiar with the children, and likewise with the children becoming more familiar with Kiddies Castle. I've no doubt they children will love their time here.

And finally, it is my intention to continue to stay on the committee for the incoming year, whether as chairperson or another capacity. I'd ask everyone who is able to do so, to give real thought to joining the committee. Without one, Kiddies Castle won't be able to operate which would be a massive loss to the community.

Thank you.

Kiddies Castle Early Years – Annual General Meeting: 28th November 2023

Treasurer's Report

The accounts for the period 1st March 2022 to 28th February 2023 show total receipts of £111,467 (£105,778 for the 12 months to 28th February 2022) and total payments of £109,440 (£123,222 for the 12 months to 28th February 2022), resulting in a surplus of £2,028 for the year, compared to a deficit of £17,443 in the prior year period. The c. £6k increase in income over the prior year period is largely driven by increased fundraising income, which accounts for c. £4k of the increase, with the balance largely coming from increased Education Authority and milk grants. The surplus for the year resulted in a closing cash balance of £30,895 compared to £28,867 for the prior year period.

The primary source of funds is from the Education Authority via the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP). The PSEP aims to provide one year of high quality, funded pre-school education, in the year before compulsory education, for every child whose parents chose to avail of the service. In the 12 months to 28th February 2023 PSEP funding accounted for 70% of receipts (74% in the prior year period). The Pathway Fund, which aims to improve the development of children who are at risk of educational underachievement, accounted for £10,000 (9%) of receipts, and this was in line with the prior year period. Other grants (Special Educational Needs funding, Engage Funding and milk grant) accounted for a further £9,741 (9%) of receipts, compared to £6,592 (6%) in the prior year period. The balance of the funding was raised through various fundraising initiatives run by the Committee and staff, including c. £3,000 raised through a 24 hour spinathon.

Expenditure is primarily related to staff wages, which accounted for 78% of payments. Wages of £85,904 were c. £8,000 lower than the prior year period as a result of the retirement of Wilma Brown. Setting costs (including rent, rates, utilities and insurance) were c. £10,000 (9%) of payments. This represented an increase of 18.5% over the prior year period due to increases in heating/electricity and building maintenance costs.

The operational environment remains challenging, with increased costs significantly impacting the viability of the setting. Increases in grants from the Education Authority, and other governmental departments, are not sufficient to offset increasing costs. Fundraising efforts are also proving to be difficult as families face their own cost of living struggles. In response to this, the committee have discussed the possibility of seeking corporate donations from local businesses to bolster the financial security of the setting. It is the hope that these donations would signal the start of a longer-term relationship with local businesses, who will hopefully participate in learning activities with the children. The committee aims to speak with local businesses in early 2024. The committee have also successfully applied for a grant from the John Moores foundation for £2,000 and are awaiting responses from Lloyds and CCP for a total of £4,300 combined.

From a financial management perspective, the Committee are in the process of transferring the accounts to Xero which should allow for a more streamlined reporting and budgeting process. In addition, the Committee are in the process of applying for a credit card for the setting for the purposes of managing petty cash given donations are primarily made online.

The accounts for the year ended 28th February 2023 were independently examined by Ryan Falls of CavanaghKelly Chartered accountants. No concerns regarding any material matters and no matters that required drawing to the attention of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland were identified as part of this examination. The unaudited accounts are due to be submitted shortly to the Charity Commission.