**Stargazing for Church based Toddler Groups – 6th January 2022**

**QUESTIONS**

***Q: How do you manage numbers when it comes to COVID?***

A: managing numbers has been an issue but we've somehow not had to turn people away (also see the section on **Booking** below)

***Q: What grants can church playgroups apply to? I’ve got permission from the church to apply.***

A: Regarding grants - contact your local voluntary sector.

A: I was contacted by Action for Children who would like to help support with financial support.

A: if its classed as a new project the Methodist church or it may be district based should have grants - will have to check though

A: we managed to get a grant from our local council through the Mayor that year for some improvements to our room as it was used for community use

A: Action for Children are doing this in our town at moment - our baby group has got £500 group (our baby group is separate from toddlers)

A: We have had a grant from the Co-op only for £500 but really helpful. We have also just applied for the Tesco blue token

A: We were given a grant from the Community Council to buy new toddler chairs. No strings attached.

A: Funding- our local Asda did the green tokens and got £100

A: Local council sometimes can help

A: We had one from the local councillor grant

***Q: How many volunteers do you have to accommodate 60 families?***

A: usually just 3 or 4.

***Q: How can you possibly get to know anyone well if you have 60 families?***

A: it’s not easy, but we see people again and again. Steve ‘pre-books’ people as they arrive so becomes familiar with the faces.

A: our leaders go and talk to the parents/carers when the kids are free playing, to get to know the families so you get snippets that way and then if they come the next week you can carry on the conversation / ask how their weeks been

A: Really helpful to have families from your church or other local churches coming. They can be great at finding time to chat and then build friendships. Grannies are gems for befriending a struggling mum.

A: Perhaps the joy of big numbers is that the team have to trust the adults and children to make their own connections between each other. That can be lifesaving

**How to get started**

* <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Mothers-Union-Guidelines.pdf>
* <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/how-start-baby-and-toddler-group>

**Support**

* <https://loveearlyyears.com/>
* <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/faith-in-the-family/playtime>

**Getting the word out**

* Use Facebook local community group pages to advertise
* we advertise on Facebook and on our circuit website
* we put craft ideas each week on Facebook
* Invite dads and mums. If you say parents, you'll mainly get mums. need to use the word dads.

**Resources and ideas**

* BigDug storage systems <https://www.bigdug.co.uk/>
* The Plastic BoxShop <https://www.plasticboxshop.co.uk/>
* Flame Creative Kids blog has tons of great ideas for prayer and art/craft activities <http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
* The Scramblers Network on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Scramblersnet>
* <https://www.lambsongs.co.nz/> for printables and images
* ShareFaith on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SharefaithChurchSolutions/>
* Saddleback Kids have great videos <https://www.youtube.com/c/SaddlebackKids?app=desktop>
* Playtime Care Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/playtimecff/>
* 1277 Facebook Group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1277makethemcount/>
* Sticky Kids resources <http://www.stickykidscatalogue.co.uk/>
* Keep playdough on the cover sheets it’s a nightmare having to scrap it up off the carpet if it’s been trodden in and spread around the carpeted room.
* <https://goteach.org.uk/store/toddlers>
* Free Bible Images (PowerPoints and scripts) <https://www.freebibleimages.org/>
* Faith in Kids is great for stories throughout the year on themes of God/Jesus makes things, God/Jesus cares, God/Jesus saves. <https://faithinkids.org/>
* Tiny Truths Bible <https://tinytruthsbible.com/bible>
* Story Stacks – the images are a bit grotesque, but our toddlers love them <https://www.storystack.co.uk/>
* Story books from Steph Williams <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/authors/steph-williams>
* We do story every week, with Bible story monthly, plus song time which always ends with Jumping Monkeys and Sleeping Bunnies!
* I have bubble time every week introduced by same music (repetition) A train they can sit on goes round a track - bring it out as a special treat. recommend you get one Singing bag. A craft: Crazy foam popular at the moment. Done it on my own for nearly 5 years.

**Music time**

* The Sleeping Bunnies Song was a favourite with many people: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9J_DqEwZdc>
* Playtime Action Songs for Toddlers <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/shop/faith-resources/playtime-action-songs-toddlers>
* We take families into a separate room for singing at the end, toys are cleared away, so toddlers know it's time to go home.
* we get all the parents to join in “tidy up time” before we do songs and stories at the end of the session. each activity has a box marked with the content
* A Google search for ‘Spotify Toddler Group songs’ and ‘Spotify Toddler Group Worship Songs’ will give you lots of possibilities
* Elevation Kids is a brilliant site for helping you find worship and action songs <https://www.elevationkids.com/>
* We have a song bag with a toy that suggests a song (cotton reel for wind the bobbin up etc) we let the children choose something from the song bag to choose the song

**Toys**

* I have very limited storage space; we have a few small push alongs and lots of other things! I agree with Jo the toys do the job!! :)
* we share a bank of toys with a homestart group
* We borrow toys from a local play library. It has the benefit of rotating toys to keep things interesting.
* I think storage is a major issue for many toddler groups … hence why we only have balls and tunnels. I don't think you need loads of toys
* we got toys donated from the community, and then just have a donations box out and people have been really generous
* We are organised to have 4 different weeks of toys. And a calendar of craft activities and stories for two years in three terms .no planning needed … is it week one, two three or four. craft activities each week linked to the story

**Keeping in touch**

* Our group leader is great at keeping in touch with the families through a WhatsApp group - she sends a message a couple of days before saying that the team are looking forward to seeing them, and then after the sessions sends a message saying how the team enjoyed seeing them. A lot of the parents are really responsive and message during the week to share news, like if a child has been poorly, which keeps the contact going outside of the sessions.
* WhatsApp groups are fantastic for keeping those relationships going in between meeting

**Volunteers**

* We have role descriptions for volunteers when recruiting
* I have team values that the team agree to when they join the team.
* Regular team meetings can be great for raising safeguarding training, and a great way to celebrate what has been good and how we plan forward. Most people understand about DBS and safeguarding training - easy online too
* Getting clergy involved is great. But often male clergy prefer to have a role. I've had one who played guitar for song time and another who did registration every week.
* I've asked parents or grandparents to join our volunteer team, they all said how pleased they were to have been asked.
* Really helpful to have families from your church or other local churches coming. They can be great at finding time to chat and then build friendships. Grannies are gems for befriending a struggling mum.
* young people like to volunteer if it’s something for their CV., but you need to be careful that they are appropriately skilled
* our church ladies knit baby blankets which we gift to new babies
* We struggle to get volunteers - a team of 6 - wow!
* I think there are so many potential volunteers in your group and also roles for people outside the group too! My neighbours help with the snipping and sorting craft preparation.
* I am finding since Covid, Volunteers don't want to come back as they don't feel safe:(
* I wonder if we are struggling to build team, perhaps our team needs to be open to those who attend, and share how it is their group, not the 'church's group'?
* I am finding since Covid, Volunteers don't want to come back as they don't feel safe:(

**Growing faith ideas**

* Church Mice acts as a link into our other activities for children and families – including our 9am service where noise and movement is welcomed!
* In conversation find out who is warm to the gospel then you can do a God slot with them with confidence. And not for those who would stop coming if you did it for everyone. Even if they stay behind for 15 mins for a prayer/bible story/action song/I use ucb word for the day appropriate readings for encouraging parents.
* we tell our families we pray for them after the group if there is anything particular they want prayer for
* We've had 3 mum's become Christians and join the church through an invite to Alpha. The route from our groups into our faith communities is important to consider, and we have found Alpha online or off invaluable.
* in my old circuit in west Yorkshire (moved to Bolton in April) I used to do a toddler praise separate from the toddler group with a bible passage using play along bible and use of visual aids and a craft and finish with a song
* We held our last session in our church and wow! The parents experienced the peace and calm. It was very different to being in the hall.
* We ran a session called Daniel's Den Praise with Bible Story, crafts based on the story and songs … depends on capacity
* part of my journey to faith was through a toddler. you are all doing a great job

**Bookings, donations and payments**

* We use a prepay card we charge £2 a week so we have a card that is £10. Having the card means I can give some to local refuge etc so that their clients don't feel uncomfortable not paying
* I think contactless is good, but some folks still need to use cash ...
* we don't turn anyone away on their first visit but encourage booking after
* I would hate to turn any family away, you just don't know how hard it may have been for a parent to get there, and then not being allowed in. I would find that really hard
* We use Eventbrite to book
* Superstars charge £2.00 which includes a drink and snack
* we went contactless just before lockdown as parents were struggling to find cash. Then after lockdown it was the perfect thing
* we run a pay as you feel. recommend £2.50 a session with free snacks and tea and coffee (good quality)
* We charge £3 per family no matter how many children. We provide tea and coffee juice and toast. A book for each child at Christmas and a Bible when children leave for nursery or school, We have lots of toys, but all have been donated
* we charge £1.50 per family and we give money to the church for our takings (church pays for coffee and tea we provide bread for toast and butter). we also buy book for Christmas and birthdays (bible books)
* We use Happity for bookings online as its specifically for toddler/baby groups <https://www.happity.co.uk/>
* we don’t have booking but we put a sign on the gate with a sad face if we are full (sorry we are full today) .but we have a sign in table so we know who has come
* we have members so don't do walk ins, although if someone turns up, I'll let them stay for the session if we have room
* We do pre-booking through ChurchSuite but also keep a few spaces open for walk-ins <https://churchsuite.com/>

**Does size matter?**

* Small numbers are good because there is the greatest opportunity for relationship of depth, amazing conversations etc.
* Small is beautiful!
* my numbers are low at moment too
* I think small groups are fab - don't feel under pressure to have loads of families
* we also struggled in September, but our numbers have increased now.
* We started in September. We have about 10 families but struggle for helpers!
* more time to develop relationships when there are just a few.

**Term-time or all the time?**

* we don't operate in holidays as we believe that the volunteers need a break, but I try and put events on for all the families
* We operate through half-terms as well as term-time and encourage families to bring older children who have moved on. It's great to see them again.

**What’s in a name?**

* Tiny Town
* Little Treasures
* Knighton Nippers
* little nippers
* Little Lions
* Prampushers Baby and toddler group
* Singing 4 Tots
* Little 'Ands!
* BIBS and BOBS
* Little Sunbeams
* Bright Beginnings
* Little Lambs
* Sparklers
* Bright Sparks,
* little ark
* Little fish
* Two by Two
* Little Lights
* Stay & Play
* Noah's Ark at St John's in Wembley.
* toddler group for pre-schoolers with additional needs
* ABC (Adults Babies and Children)
* Tots Praise
* KidStop
* Monday Mornings - so we can never change the day!
* Happy Feet
* Parish Pandas
* Superstars