

Christmas 2021



Dear Friends,

As a friend might say to you; 'it's been an interesting year!' The word 'interesting' of course in this kind of statement hides a multitude of different emotions and challenges and that has certainly been true for everyone involved with the Family Centre.

Covid19

As the different age groups of the population were progressively vaccinated it won't have escaped your notice that children from 0-11yrs have not been. Not surprisingly this has meant that the covid virus has continued to circulate very widely amongst these age groups. This has impacted the Family Centre a lot during the autumn season. Since September there have only been about 3 days when the entire staff team have been able to work at the same time! This has been because individual staff members have themselves been ill, their children have been ill and they have had to care for them, or staff member's children have been sent home from school to isolate because of a covid contact. As you can imagine this has been very disruptive but, amazingly, only a handful of sessions during the autumn season have had to be cancelled. The trustees have congratulated Catherine and Helen, our two acting leaders, on how well they have managed to 'keep the red kite flying' in the midst of such adversity! We have been grateful to them, and the whole staff team for remaining so positive. We have also been grateful to Julie Tattersfield, former staff member, who has often stepped in at short notice to help cover absences and to our great volunteer team, without whom we couldn't have managed.



The Family Centre was well represented at the Remembrance Sunday Service at Thame war memorial.

Update on the Family Centre Programme

Because of the on-going pandemic we have continued to limit the numbers of families attending individual sessions so that we can maintain a strong hygiene/cleaning regime and also minimise the risks of infection from one to another. This has meant that we have often had to operate a waiting list for sessions. You can see the current programme details for both Thame and Chinnor on our website. There has been particular interest from parents with new-borns wanting to attend sessions and so 'Brilliant Babies' has been a new version of 'Stay and Play' that has been offered, particularly for this youngest age group. Not surprisingly mums are really keen to come to these networking opportunities after the months of lockdown and isolation. Helen and Catherine with Rebecca and Mandy have also been offering special sessions for young parents occasionally, sensory explorers for those with additional needs and crawlers and cruisers for 6-12 month yr. olds.

Outdoor Explorers

This new exciting aspect of our programme deserves its own section. Following its launch in the summer our leased plot of land at Moreton Barn Farm is being put to good use. Some special sessions were arranged during the summer holidays and outdoor sessions are now part of our regular programme with at least one session being held there each week and also extra dad's sessions on a Saturday. Come rain or shine, winter or summer, this is a great venue in which young children can enjoy learning and playing in a safe outdoor environment with lots of exciting and



stimulating activities. Becca and Mandy invested a lot of time in setting up the area and we are really reaping the benefit of their hard work. Sessions are usually fully booked and really enjoyed by everyone who comes. The children don't mind what the weather is like and the parents are getting used to the idea! The only time we have to stop is if there is a Met Office yellow, amber or red warning. I know that a few of you were able to come to Moreton when we held Amy's farewell barbecue there. We do hope that many more of you will come and visit in the new year when we are planning to arrange an official opening.

Family Registration and Booking System

Partly in response to Covid and partly as a way of streamlining our administration, all parent users now have to register on our website before they can come to a session. This is easy to do and is free and about 230 families are now registered. Apart from a few 'invitation only' sessions, all our sessions are now bookable online and this has greatly improved the management of numbers and records of attendance as well as reassuring parents that we are limiting numbers for their safety. During September and October most sessions were fully booked and the lowest number was 81%. Numbers actually turning up were lower than this, typically between 69 and 75% of those booked. This was often because of last minute illness, quite common in very young children, but there were also 'no shows' which is frustrating when others have been turned away. We are beginning to introduce a waitlist to try and deal with this and we are also going to strengthen our public messages about what it costs to run these sessions so as to encourage the most responsible attitude to booking that we can.

Our new Family Centre Administrator

Marie Scott joined us in June at about the time I last wrote to you. Marie has really 'hit the ground running' with many of the innovations described above having been put together by her, together with the regular updating of our Family Centre website. We are delighted with the way Marie has been managing her role. Her 'can do' approach is just what we needed in these challenging times.





Appointment of new Family Centre Manager

As you will have seen in the media in recent months, many organisations have been struggling to recruit the staff they need. We weren't able to appoint a new leader for the Family Centre in the summer as we had hoped but I am delighted to report that we have now appointed Sarah Candy who will become our Family Centre Manager in January. Sarah has been a teacher and literacy co-ordinator at Mill Lane Primary School in Chinnor until her current maternity leave. Sarah will bring much experience of working with children and families to this new role for her and we are very much looking forward to welcoming her to the Family Centre in the new year.

Lastly, the trustees want to give special thanks to Catherine Myles and Helen Burton, our two acting leaders. They have ended up having to manage the Family Centre for much longer than any of us thought would be needed and they have had to do so (as I have described above) in the most challenging circumstances of the on-going pandemic. They have both done a brilliant job and we are very grateful to them.

Thank you so much to all those of you, 'Friends', parent users, benefactors and others, who continue to offer such generous financial support. We wouldn't be 'there for every family' without you! On behalf of all the trustees, we wish everyone associated with the Family Centre a very Happy Christmas and peaceful New Year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hulett". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John Hulett, Chair of Trustees