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Report to Witney Town Council – Youth Grant Fund March 2021

Home-Start Oxford's COVID-adapted service continues to provide remote support to local families with children under 5 years by providing safe welcoming online spaces via Zoom, where parents can meet and join in activities appropriate for their young children. Groups are delivered by our Family Group Coordinator supported by two volunteers. Our Group Coordinator has recruited guest speakers based on discussion and requests from attendees of our Parent's Get Together group. The groups have helped to keep the local community strong and healthy at a time when young families have faced unprecedented strain.

Groups have been promoted through our social media channels where parents are able to request to attend. We collect basic demographics for the purposes of safeguarding and monitoring. All parents receive a welcoming telephone call with ongoing communication via WhatsApp and email.

Alongside the groups we have distributed Cook meals to local families, Baby bank items, Waitrose donations, children's wet weather clothing, and donated Christmas gifts and meals. Doorstep deliveries have enabled us to retain relationships with the most vulnerable families who find accessing support more difficult.

Since September 2020 we have delivered the following groups:

- ✓ LITTLE SPLASHERS – a warm and friendly space where parents and babies under one enjoy stories, singing and sharing experiences and tips. Currently 30 families are registered, attendance ranges between 16-32 parents and their babies.
- ✓ PARENT'S GET TOGETHER – a popular space for peer-to-peer support. We invite guest speakers identified by parents in the group. Guest speakers have included a Nursery Nurse from the health visiting team delivering sessions on sleep, weaning and winter illness; Community Dental service – children's teeth; Parenting with a local parenting specialist; Peeples - Getting outdoors; Breastfeeding support. Currently 22 families are registered to this group alone with attendance between 16 and 30 people (including parents from other groups)
- ✓ PEEP GROUPS (BY-INVITATION) – these groups ensure we reached the most vulnerable families by running 2 x 6 weekly groups of up to 6 families who needed more support to engage. These safe structured groups attended by referral, are aimed at parents who find attending groups daunting. The group includes singing, stories, free play ideas and a structured parents information session on their role as their child's first educator. Parents attending this group develop the confidence to attend other open access groups.
- ✓ BABY MASSAGE ONLINE – we have delivered 2 x 3-week taster sessions with a trained facilitator. Both groups were oversubscribed. More short courses are planned including Sing & Sign.

- ✓ NEW in March 2021, PUDDLE JUMPERS STORY TIME – this group is aimed at children aged over 1 years with a fun Storytime focus.

We continue to run the groups above, improving/adapting our online offer; our numbers continue to rise with new registrants coming forward every week. Online groups have also enabled us to reach new families, from Witney and the surrounding villages e.g., families in remoter villages or affected by a disability or anxiety making in person attendance difficult. We will continue to explore online delivery even after restrictions are lifted.

Currently we are planning our transition back to delivering 'in real life' groups when restrictions permit (in line with the Governments road map) including a new buggy-walk. We are consulting with parents to determine whether they are enthusiastic to return to in person groups or more hesitant. One parent has told us 'she is worried her baby will be overwhelmed and struggle with a large group of parents and children'.

Parents' Feedback:

Mum receiving doorstep delivery Cook meal - "It's been so good just not to have to think about a meal for the family for one night of the week".

Mums attending Little Splashers told us:

"I've found these classes absolutely invaluable during lockdown and am so grateful to have found them! They've given us some structure for the day and W has most certainly learnt some of the songs and rhymes which is lovely to see. Yours and vol R enthusiasm is so uplifting and I'm sure has helped so many Mums stuck at home feeling a bit lonely. Online classes are hard, but you've managed to keep them fun and engaging and they keep W's interest which is quite a task!.... I'd love to donate to Home-Start if I can to say thanks for helping me through a tough couple of months."

"Having the groups to access has made a big difference to us – particularly when Dylan was younger. Having groups online in spite of lockdown means you are able to maintain a kind of routine even when you are at home all day and shape your day around something – it helps to get through the long days together with a baby at home! The Little Splashers group in particular is brilliant – Roz is such an amazing presence even on Zoom and my son really enjoyed the songs (plus it was useful for me to learn them as he enjoys me singing to him at home!) Lisa is also an incredibly friendly and supportive person and merely getting the chance to see and speak to her at each group cheered me up a bit! I really appreciate the Home-Start emphasis on 'real life parenting' and I've found this has reassured me about the challenges of parenting which I hadn't anticipated and helped me to appreciate that these are all normal!"

"Having these online sessions has really helped me to feel less isolated as a new mum and being in lockdown. It brought routine to my day when I had no other plans. We loved seeing other faces on the screen and Rosie was really engaged and learnt a lot from the group.

We are so excited to go to face to face groups so R can interact with other babies, and I can interact with other mums, but we would still continue an online group alongside this if it was available. It's nice to have the option of both, especially the convenience of being in your own home."

"When lockdown started again in November, I saw on Facebook late at night that there was a sing and sign baby group and asked to join. I was fed up of zoom, but hoped something

involved like singing might be a bit more fun. I loved it from the very beginning, and so did S. You've both been enthusiastic and welcoming every week. We've got some new favourite songs (the bicycle song!), and we've carried on some of the signs (milk milk milk!) The weekly catch ups have been invaluable, they give structure to our Tuesdays, I have loved seeing the other babies grow, and I can honestly say the sessions cheer me up even on the gloomiest days. I would continue to attend virtual sessions, as they are easy to join, and often we're still in our pyjamas at 10am! Thanks so much..."

Financial update

We are on course to fully spend the grant, which is paying for our Family Group Coordinator's salary plus her support and supervision, volunteer training, guest speaker costs, and Zoom license.

We anticipate spending on the same budget lines to the end of August, with the reinstatement of room hire costs at Witney Methodist Church, guidelines and risk assessment permitting.

Thank you for this valuable funding which is helping us provide the stimulation, development opportunities and parental support that will help the youngest children in Witney to thrive.

Your help to promote our work in the town, and connect vulnerable families to our support, is always welcome. Lisa West is our Family Group Coordinator and can be reached on 07590 863 095 or families connected via Facebook – Home Start Oxford in Witney & West Oxfordshire