

ROMSEY OPPORTUNITY GROUP

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Presented at the Annual General Meeting 26th January 2021

As we begin 2021 our Golden Anniversary year we look back on the strangest and possibly most challenging year in our history!

The year began with 12 children attending our sessions and visits from Portage and a Teacher Advisor.

In March we entered lockdown and the Appletree Centre was closed by Hampshire County Council.

Our Trustees put Mavis and May on Furlough but Carol and myself continued to message or meet virtually. Our families felt the sting of isolation and I started a Social Media group using WhatsApp. It has been described as a lifeline during this time and I'm honestly impressed by the way our families began to support each other. It's very true to the ethos of the group offering reassurance and information, a virtual shoulder to cry on and plenty of laughter. Sue Fisher has been our visible face, using up hers and our exercise quota on her bike delivering little parcels to the families often kindly made by volunteers. Liz turned part of her house into a children's music studio and recorded a weekly video for our Facebook group.

Carol has continued to produce and send newsletters and I have attended more meetings than before lockdown!

As the summer term progressed and the Government encouraged Early Years groups to return, we faced the difficulty of not fitting into the Coronavirus Regulations for a Toddler group or Nursery. Local infection rate was low and I sought advice from the Department for Education who confirmed us as an Early Years Provider with the added uniqueness of including Parent/Carers.

Unfortunately, despite much communication the process for HCC allowing us to restart sessions at the Appletree Centre did not begin until late August by which time our MP and our Patron Councillor Mark Cooper were also supporting our plight!

Our leavers party was another virtual occasion our first using Zoom and coinciding with the first Birthday of one of our children.

4 children were due to leave us for school. 1 child had a seamless transition within mainstream but only 1 out of the 3 other children had a place secured within special schools. The pressure on these Parents was enormous and both began the appeal process. I supported both with letters and phone calls to SEN services and we agreed to support them until they were offered a school place.

In July and September 4 children were offered specialist Nursery placements again with much stress and communication with myself. 1 of these children is attending special school nursery part time and continuing with ourselves.

Our risk assessment written by Dick, Trustee, was accepted by HCC and we both met to discuss our requirements. It was helpful that I had attended a training course on becoming a Covid secure work environment and we negotiated with HCC being able to take 5 children at each session instead of their suggestion of 2.

We offered places to 6 new children 4 of whom accepted. There are now 9 children registered with us as attending ROG. We continue to support families with other siblings making the total 19 in addition to Parents at this current time.

We held sessions in October just for 2 weeks until a second lockdown they were put on hold until our 2 Christmas sessions. It was wonderful to see Mavis and our team of volunteers for those 6 sessions. Our new families are mostly settling well into the WhatsApp group and we have now begun a weekly zoom virtual coffee morning. I am still requested reports on the children and look forward to this being much easier when able to see them in person! I meet with the Trustees regularly to review the local infection risks with a view to safely opening again.

Lyn Bird
Family Coordinator
Romsey Opportunity Group