



Annual Report
October 2011

Registered Charity No 1100532

Merry Go Round Toy Library

Merry Go Round Toy Library opened 12 years ago in Exeter Scrapstore. It is open twice a week throughout the year not only for families with children aged from a few months to early teens, but also for any groups or individuals involved in providing day care for children.

Toy libraries are exciting places to visit, like an Aladdin's cave full of things you want to take home; they are centres for lending the best toys and games which adults and children can enjoy together.

We have a wide selection of good quality toys, games and resource books for hire, and are happy to offer help and advice about meeting the needs of individual children. We can also advise on which resources would suit group play.



Many of our toys are great for children with additional needs, and we also have a large selection of multicultural toys and books.

We make no charge for breakages, but do ask for toys to be returned in a clean condition.



How Much Will It Cost?

- Family membership £5 per year
- Group membership £15 per year

There is a weekly fee for each item borrowed. Rates start at 30p per week. More expensive toys are £1 per week.

Returnable deposits are required for some toys.

Groups can borrow toys and play equipment by the half-term at reduced rates.



Opening Hours

Tuesdays: 1pm-4pm

Thursdays: 10am-1pm

Contact

Tel: 01392 436777

Email:
fiona@mgrtoylibrary.org

Website:
www.mgrtoylibrary.org

Visit us at

Exeter Scrapstore
Gordon Road
Exeter
EX1 2DH

Visit our website to view online catalogues to search for specific toys, look at the toy lists for ideas for older children, parties or for children with little or no sight, or use the contact page to ask a question.



Carousel Toy Library

Carousel Toy Library is a branch of Merry Go Round, based in St Thomas on the west side of the River Exe. We operate from a specially constructed space in the hall of West Exe Children's Centre.

Our co-ordinator is Fiona Daughton, who is helped by a management committee made up of toy library members.

We provide high quality toys for a nominal fee to children aged from a few months to primary age. Some toys are specially designed for children with disabilities, others aim to promote multicultural awareness. We also have a resource library of books for parents and carers.



Carousel is open mainly for families but groups or individuals involved in providing day care for children are also welcome to join.

A wider range of toys suitable for groups can be found at our Merry Go Round branch.



How Much Will It Cost?

- Family membership £5 per year
- Group membership £15 per year

There is a weekly fee for each item borrowed. Rates start at 30p per week. More expensive toys are £1 per week.

Returnable deposits are required for some toys.

Groups can borrow toys and play equipment by the half-term at reduced rates.



Opening Hours

Thursdays 10am-1pm

Contact us

Tel: 01392 279361

Email: fiona@mgrtoylibrary.org

Website:
www.mgrtoylibrary.org

Visit us at

West Exe Children's Centre
Cowick Street
St Thomas
Exeter
EX4 1HL

More toys can be borrowed for special events such as parties; you can also book toys if there is something you particularly want.



Volunteers, Committee Members and Friends of Merry Go Round

Volunteers

Everyone who helps our charity in a non-paid capacity is counted as a volunteer, including committee members. Apart from being on the committee, there are lots of other ways volunteers can support us including helping at fundraising events, toy library sessions or with publicity.

Volunteers use their specific skills as and when they feel they can – this can include making cakes for cake stalls, mending toys, taking leaflets and posters to toddler groups, helping at car boot sales, writing articles for the newsletter, updating toy databases etc.

Tasks for volunteers helping in the toy libraries include:

- helping to set up
- checking toys which are returned
- cleaning toys
- helping keep tidy during the session
- welcoming customers
- occasional cataloguing etc

Committee members

Committee members need to be members of the toy library and are usually Trustees of the charity and as such have responsibility for ensuring the toy libraries are run in accordance with the law and our Constitution (we do have Trustee's Indemnity Insurance which covers against accidental mistakes).

Committee members:

- manage the staff, promoting good working practice and conditions
- make decisions about the running of the toy libraries
- make a commitment to attend meetings (approx every 2 months with refreshments) including the AGM and our summer and winter socials
- use their skills to support the toy library - some are officers eg Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer or Secretary, each of which has its own responsibilities
- produce the newsletter and help with publicity
- link in with everything else going on in the project eg fundraising

Friends of Merry Go Round

This is a new and exciting opportunity for anyone who has an interest in supporting our charity and helping it become sustainable. You can become a Friend of Merry Go Round by getting involved with fund raising activities and ideas or with promotional events to raise our profile in the local community. We hope to hold one or two major fundraising events per year plus other smaller events.

You can choose whether to work as part of a group or you might want to do something as an individual or family, or you could just make a donation. Other organisations such as local companies can also become a Friend.

For more information please contact our Chair Pat on 01392 877907, see Fiona or Nicky in toy library sessions or email fiona@mgrtoylibrary.org. We also have a website www.mgrtoylibrary.org with information about our Charity.

To ensure that vulnerable children are protected, we carry out a vetting procedure for any volunteers working directly with children or families and also for committee members. This involves security checks by the Police, and character references.

Merry Go Round Toy and Leisure Library Chair's Report for the 2011 AGM

I would like to open our AGM by welcoming you this evening and hope that you will return home more fully informed of our Charities activities.

It is not until Fiona and I sit down together to work out who is going to say what to you that I realise what we have achieved over the last year. I always get a good feeling at this time of year and am glad that the AGM gives us the time to reflect and celebrate. We are after all a small charity but I believe we do an enormous amount of good work here in Exeter for children and families. It is not an English trait to pat ourselves on our backs and say haven't we done well, so let's do that.

I think I might sound like a broken record when I report on our funding difficulties and concerns as we move through the year, but there is someone, somewhere looking after us yet again. A little of that later on. We are all aware of the national and local budget cuts on all sectors of society and the Government tells us that we are all in this together, and Charities are certainly a case in question. Projects have to continually evaluate their services and delivery and make changes to meet their smaller budgets and enable them to meet their needs of their users. Years of development work have enabled me to understand that this is actually not a bad thing on occasions. It does make us think about how we deliver and it can shake us out of our cosiness and make us look at the facts more closely. The Toy Library committee and staff are doing just this at present and addressing who can deliver the different strands of our work. Hence our launch of Friends of Merry Go Round and enhancing our use of volunteers within our service. This could be a lot of work, but I believe will put our Toy Libraries on a firmer footing and enable us to be sustainable throughout the coming years. Have you come forward yet!?

We have been very fortunate to have had one of our homes here in the Scrapstore and enjoyed good relationships with the projects who share the space. One of the things we had to face early this year, was the news that Exeter City Council were sadly having to cut the services of the Scrapstore having supported it from the beginning. This was due to their own cuts and I know that this would not have been an easy decision. We were pleased when Peter and Jo decided to make the Scrapstore a Social Enterprise scheme and in August took over its running. They are now our landlords and we would like to publicly wish them lots of luck and look forward to working with them in the future. I believe that this partnership and that with Magic Carpet, can only be a positive thing when it comes to sustainability and support from the wider community.

We have been very fortunate in receiving funds from ATASS Foundation for the next three years towards our budget. They have a panel of employees who choose the charities that they wish to support and we thank them for putting their faith in our project. They will not be disappointed. This has enabled us to put more time into our strategic thinking, particularly around Governance which will strengthen our project. Thank you so very much.

This time of year gives me an opportunity on behalf of the Toy Libraries to say my thank yous publicly. I like this bit! First and foremost, our funders are our lifeline and here they are:

- West Exe Children Centre support Carousel hugely and it is a lovely toy library serving the people over the other side of the river. Thank you Sarah for putting your faith in us on behalf of your families.

- Exeter City Council who give us funds for our rent and some core funding. This is hugely valuable and I hope that this partnership can continue despite these difficult times. Thank you.
- The Norman Family Charitable Trust in Budleigh Salterton has valued our work for some time and continues to support on a yearly basis.
- Cllr Hannaford for his money for toys and equipment and the excitement when these all arrive in the post.
- The Co-operative Community Fund who gave us money for core costs (salaries) which is always a difficult one because it is not very exciting but oh so necessary.
- Eastgate Rotary has a BBQ every year and the money raised is for Toy Library. Of course it is, it is in my garden!

Last but not least, our own fundraising which was £1330.86 this year so thank you to everyone who took part in our various activities. They are quite a lot of fun and I personally get to meet members of our toy library. Well done and thank you to everyone.

My personal thanks go to the members of the committee, who although busy people, continue to support the Toy Library in their own way. I would particularly like to thank Jude Green for donating 10% of the proceeds of her lovely cards to us. I cannot resist them.

Thanks to my Vice Chair John who continues to help us with IT support revitalising at intervals our on-line mailing list, website and all those things that computers have to offer. As John knows, way above my head but thanks so much John for all the time you spend on behalf of the project.

Fiona and Nicky - well what can I say. They are a great team and continue their enthusiasm through thick and thin so if you are having a sad day, just pop into one of our toy libraries have a little play and you will find that all is well with the world when you go home. I think I say every year, that Fiona **IS** the Toy Library and we are so lucky to have her as our Toy Library Co-ordinator.

I will stop now, but we look forward to another year of providing a valuable service to the children and families of Exeter and look forward to a year of continued local support and fun along the way.

Pat Cusa (Chair)

Merry Go Round Toy & Leisure Library Toy Library Co-ordinator's Report for the 2011 AGM

The last financial year was an incredibly busy one for our charity; there was a total of 1,745 visits made to Merry Go Round and Carousel Toy Libraries, which were open for 3 sessions a week for 47 weeks of the year. The number of transactions rose by a massive 21% compared to the previous year, which shows the increasing need for our services (see separate statistics sheets for more details).

191 local families and childcare groups became members of our two toy libraries which represents up to 1,179 children who had access to good quality toys, resource books and play equipment. Members included parents, grandparents, childminders and a variety of childcare groups and organisations.

In March we carried out an evaluation the Toy Libraries which showed very positive outcomes of attending our toy library for children and their parents/carers as well as the environment. More details can be seen further on in the Annual Report.

During the summer we provided activities, fundraising stalls and information about the toy libraries at Exeter Respect Festival, which attracted hundreds of local families. This was a really fun event and our impromptu plate spinning workshops were very popular with children and adults of all ages, as was the playdough table and soft toy tombola.

Once again we ran Carousel Summer Stay & Plays at West Exe Children's Centre in addition to our normal services, with arts and crafts based on a 'Rainforest' theme. Some lovely work was produced by children and their families, who also made full use of the wonderful gardens at the Centre. There is a separate report, which includes photos, which gives more information.

The committee, toy library members and other volunteers, including the Parents' Voice at West Exe, have been very busy helping us with fundraising activities. Some of the events this year were a toy, children's books and cake stall, a recycled clothes collection, a car boot stall and a sponsored toddle around Belmont Park.

We are currently launching 'Friends of Merry Go Round' for everyone who would like to help promote and support our charity, and their first fundraiser will happen in November in the Hut in the Park.

Our website is becoming more and more popular, with many new members finding us through our online presence, whilst existing members make good use of the online catalogues of toys and contact page. We now have a Facebook page and use Flickr to display photographs about the toy libraries. Recently we entered an online competition with the Co-operative Big Community Vote, and although we were unsuccessful it was good publicity and raised our profile. We are currently in the Natwest Community Force online competition so hopefully everyone will vote for us!

Many of our more popular toys had started wearing out, so we were delighted to have a grant from Cllr Hannaford to buy both new and replacement toys to refresh our existing stock. There are now lots more things to borrow and the libraries are looking brighter and more fun than ever.

Thanks to all our members, especially the very little ones, who helped us test toys this year – the results of the tests can be seen in a supplement published by the Independent Newspaper in October, alongside those from 4 other toy libraries across the country.

Fiona Daughton (Toy Library Co-ordinator)

Merry Go Round Toy & Leisure Library Treasurer's Report for the 2011 AGM

Financial statement (all figures rounded to nearest pound)

Merry Go Round Toy Library

As at 12th October 2011:

£351 cash
£8538 bank
-£197 not yet presented
£8692 total

Carousel Toy Library

As at 1st October 2011:

£150 cash
£6275 bank
-£780 not yet presented
£5645 total

We also have a contingency account to make sure there are funds available for closing costs such as redundancy payments if for any reason we cannot continue operating. The committee agreed this could be used in the short term for other costs if necessary.

Contingency Account

As at 12th October 2011:

£5736 total

Annual Accounts

The annual accounts for the period 6th April 2010 to 5th April 2011 were inspected by an independent examiner (Veronica Mathieson, Finance Manager for Exeter CVS). The independent examiner stated that her examination showed proper accounting records had been kept and the accounts agreed with the accounting records. We would like to thank Veronica and Exeter CVS for all the help and advice they give us with annual accounts and payroll.

A copy of the report and the statement of accounts are available for anyone who would like to look at them. The annual return was submitted to the Charity Commission on 12th October 2011. This can be viewed online.

Our income for last year was £21,597 with an expenditure of £20,335, showing a surplus of £1,262

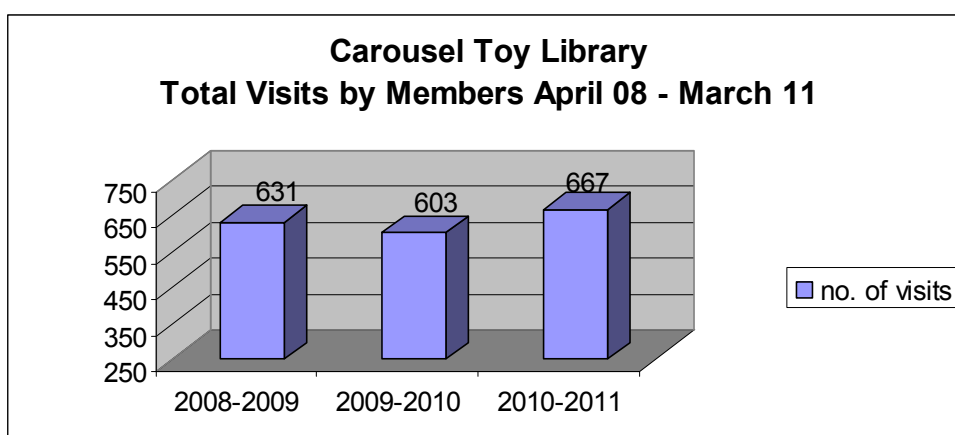
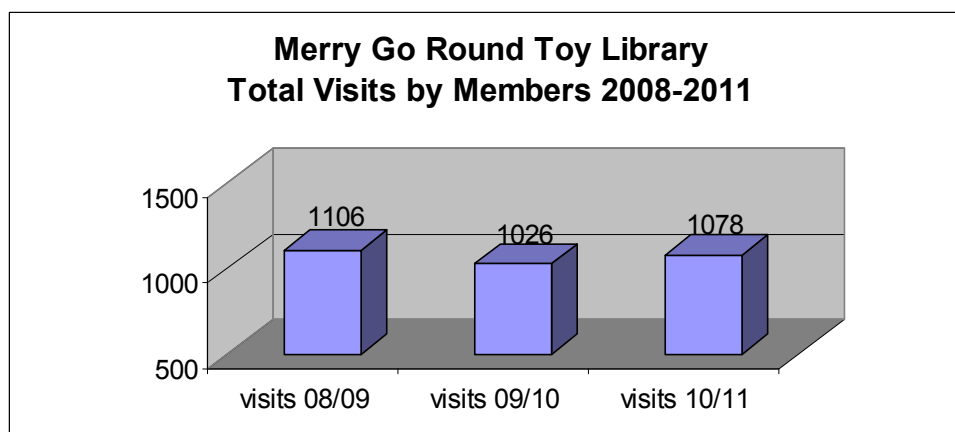
Grants and donations

We would like to offer a big thank you to the following for their financial support during the last 12 months:

- Exeter City Council
- West Exe Children's Centre
- The Co-operative Community Fund
- Exeter Play Association
- The Norman Family Charitable Trust
- Cllr Rob Hannaford
- Eastgate Rotary Club
- ATASS Foundation

Sally Dymond (Treasurer)

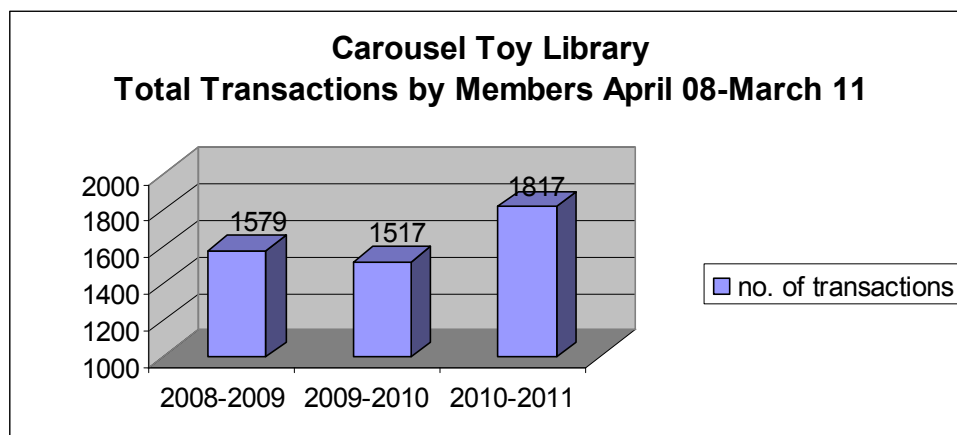
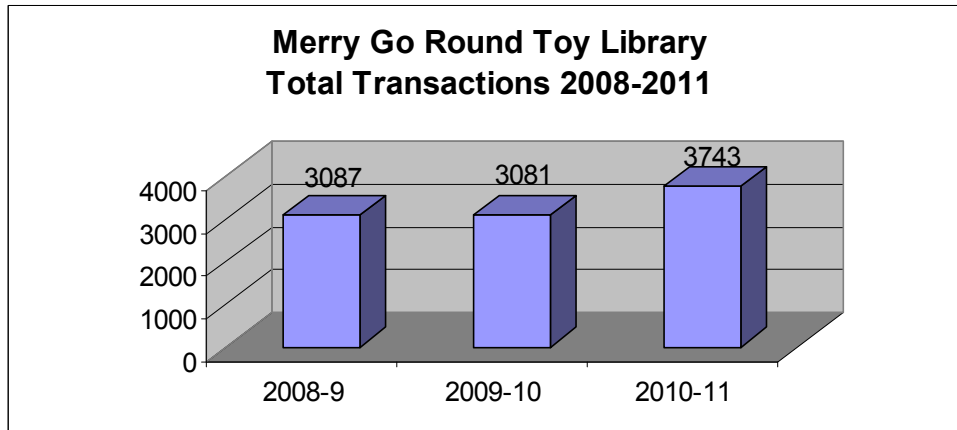
Merry Go Round Toy & Leisure Libraries Statistics April 2011



Both toy libraries have been consistently busy during the last 3 years, which is illustrated in the graphs above. A total of 1745 visits were made during the last financial year by 191 members borrowing and returning toys. These include families, childminders and childcare groups living in and around Exeter and represent up to 1179 children who had access to good quality toys, resource books and play equipment. Figures do not include visitors who just want information about the toy libraries. The libraries open throughout the year, normally closing just for Christmas, an annual stock check and for polling day at Carousel. There are two sessions a week at Merry Go Round, and one at Carousel.

In addition to normal services we also hold Summer Stay & Play sessions (last year these had an average attendance of 18 children plus parents/carers per session) and activities and information sessions at Exeter's Playdays in the Park, including the annual Respect Festival.

The children who use our toy libraries are mainly aged from a few weeks to early teens, but we have also lent toys to adults with learning or physical disabilities, all are welcome. Children come from a wide range of social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, and some have additional needs – we provide a wide range of good quality toys which are chosen to provide for these needs and which enhance learning and development through play.



The number of transactions for both toy libraries (toys borrowed, deposits returned and overdue fees) has shown a large rise of 21%, with 5560 transactions from April 10 to March 11 compared to 4598 in the previous year.

The rise in transactions reflects the current economic climate, as many families and groups now have more limited resources and cannot afford to buy so many toys for their children. There is also a higher awareness of the value of recycling toys. The increased use of the toy libraries highlights the need of local children to have access to good quality toys and play resources which are affordable.

Merry Go Round Toy & Leisure Libraries

Results from Feedback Forms March 2011

Feedback forms were handed out to toy library members in March 2011 to evaluate the service provided by Merry Go Round and Carousel Toy Libraries. 35 forms were completed by families who had been attending for at least two months; families who had only recently joined the toy library were not given a form as it was felt they would not yet be able to give accurate feedback.

Section A looked at ways the toy library had impacted on children and their parents/carers. All 35 of the parents/carers questioned said the toy library had helped them find toys which were right for their child's interest and level of development:

The help and advice on appropriate toys to borrow means we choose ones we might not otherwise.

Finding out what toys are available has been really useful and it's lovely to be able to provide my child with more variety of toys.

Emily has played with toys which we would not have bought for her eg Wedgits.

Excellent facility, providing learning/developmental opportunities not otherwise necessarily accessible.

86% (30) said attending the toy library had helped their child gain new skills or promoted their development whilst 63% (22) found it had provided more opportunities for their child to play with other children:

Very beneficial for Troy to mix and play with other children and take a toy home instead of just being home with two old biddies while his mummy works! (Granny with 21 month old)

66% (23) found attending had helped their child learn about sharing

Trying out a variety of toys, learning child's interests and increasing understanding of sharing.

71% (25) now have more knowledge of how their children play at different ages/stages and 63% (22) said that coming to the toy library had increased the interaction between them and their child.

Section B looked at the environmental and financial aspects of attending the toy library. 71% of parents (25) said they now bought fewer toys. This impacts on the amount of non-recyclable plastic which goes to landfill, as low quality toys with poor play value often end up in the bin very rapidly.

Great for the environment – recycle, recycle!

86% (30) said they had borrowed toys they wouldn't normally be able to afford. The amount of toys borrowed from the toy library has increased by 21% compared to the previous year, which links with the impact of the recession on local families and childcare groups:

I like getting ideas from staff and borrowing big toys we can't afford.

When I set up the equipment from the toy library in my 0-3 group the children rush in to see what new exciting activities are available for them to play with. The group has very little money so it's great to be able to provide the children with new and exciting items each week that stimulate them.

Section C asked parents about other ways in which they might have benefited; 83% (29) valued meeting and talking to toy library staff:

What a wonderful place this toy library is! The staff are very helpful and knowledgeable and most of all approachable. One of my favourite places to visit with my son.

51% (20) had accessed childcare advice and support, whilst attending had given 43% (15) more time to play with their child, and 43% (15) had benefited through socialising and exchanging ideas with other parents and carers.

Other comments included:

(Carousel) Summer play sessions have been excellent!

Area to play is stimulating so enjoy staying and not just borrowing.

Brilliant idea. Should be increased in both size and volume and opening hours – advertising increased.

Borrowed toys don't want to own long term due to space issues.

Great place to come and hire toys as extremely reasonable prices.

My little boy gets excited when we arrive at the toy library, and he enjoys his time exploring new toys and watching other children play.

Useful to be able to borrow larger items for birthday parties.

Thank you, the toy library is fantastic and I don't know what I'd do without it.

We love the toy library. Thank you!

Overall it can be seen that the toy libraries are meeting the needs of children from local families and childcare groups in a range of ways, as well as helping the environment. Children have had access to good quality toys, games and play resources which many might not otherwise have been able to afford. They have learnt new skills and developed through play as well as learning how to share. Parents have gained more knowledge of what toys to borrow to aid their child's development in a quality play environment where they can meet other parents and carers and ask advice from trained staff. Most of all, parents/carers and children have had the opportunity to have fun together.

Review of Carousel Stay & Plays Summer 2011 'Rainforests'



Over the summer Carousel Toy Library provided 4 structured play sessions in addition to its normal sessions for borrowing toys. There were different arts and crafts each week, based on a rainforest theme. The aim was to give parents and their children of different ages an increased opportunity for quality interactions whilst having fun together. Children were free to choose from a range of toys and activities including baby toys, small world, role play, construction and sensory toys. Playdough, painting and craft activities were provided at each session followed by a healthy snack and physical play. We finished each session with a circle time with lots of action songs to learn and join in with.

This year the good weather enabled us to use the garden for the last part of each session which parents and children enjoyed:

Good to have use of the outdoor areas

Lovely to have some time in outdoor space

It's so good to have access to outdoor space

The Rainforest theme was very popular, with arts and crafts led by Jess from Magic Carpet. Children of different ages and their parents worked together to make butterfly and parrot masks, a giant rainforest collage for the wall, tribal pattern printing and musical instruments. Craft activities were geared towards different age ranges and abilities, with a variety of things to make each session. This meant both toddlers and older children had fun making things with their parents:

Nice that there is a theme for the sessions.

Crafts were great and age appropriate

Arts and crafts materials are wonderful

Great range of activities

A great stay and play, we love the craft sessions

Last year there was a problem with too many attending for the limited space available so this year we only provided 16 bookable child spaces to keep numbers down, with all places being booked. An average of 9 adults and 12 children attended each group, as some families dropped out for different reasons. Although we could have catered for a few more children, this worked well, especially as we were able to use the gardens for the end of each session. One comment on the feedback noted it was a *calm, organised environment*



During the four weeks, 13 different families attended (20 different children) with most coming for more than one session. This included three dads who came either with their partners or just with their children during different sessions.

Ages of children ranged from a few weeks to 8 years, with the majority of children aged between 2 and 4 years.

Suggestions for improvements to our service

There was one request for more sessions on different days. Another parent thought there weren't enough age appropriate toys available for her 4 year old son during the first session. This was addressed by staff after consultation with the toy library co-ordinator on which toys to provide. Another suggestion was maybe to have snack time a little earlier. No other suggestions were given:

Can't think of anything (improvements) – really great sessions

Any other comments

There were some very positive comments including the following:

Loved the healthy snacks!

Staff all very helpful

Stay & Play sessions were well planned.

Really really good, my daughter loved them. I hope you could do more!

All the staff are very friendly and helpful. I hope it (the group) lasts as it is a nice break for children and parents

Friendly staff

Excellent value

My girls really enjoyed coming to do all the activities. They have made friends and loved it.' (4 and 8 years)



Conclusion

We met the aim of providing a play session in which the whole family could engage in together, including babies and children of primary age. Children had access to the resources of Carousel Toy Library as well as quality arts and crafts activities. The sessions attracted several dads, who came either with their partners or just with their children. The atmosphere was much more relaxed compared to last year as we offered fewer places which kept numbers down, and parents really enjoyed the outdoor play opportunities during the second half of the session. As there were some drop outs we could have catered for a few more families, so next year we will have a reservation list for families who can attend at short notice.



Having a worker from Magic Carpet worked very well, as Jess is experienced at providing quality craft activities for children of different ages. We also provided two skilled play workers who were very organised, helpful and friendly which made the sessions go smoothly.

There was a minor problem in the first session as the toy library co-ordinator wasn't available to show staff (who were new to the toy library) the full range of toys for different ages, but this was addressed for subsequent sessions. Overall Carousel Summer Stay & Plays (which were in addition to our normal toy library services) went very well and provided lots of fun for the whole family.