



Annual Report
November 2023

Registered Charity No 1100532

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Merry Go Round Toy Libraries

Trustees and Committee Members November 2023

Officers

Chair: Alex Allan

Honorary Treasurer: Nicolette Jeffrey

Honorary Secretary: Andrea Bristow

Committee Members

Joy Rogers

Kelly Allan

Helene Prestat

Senior Staff Member

Andrea Bristow (Toy Library Coordinator/Manager)

Staff Members

Kelly Allan (Toy Librarian)

Fiona Daughton (Cover Toy Librarian)

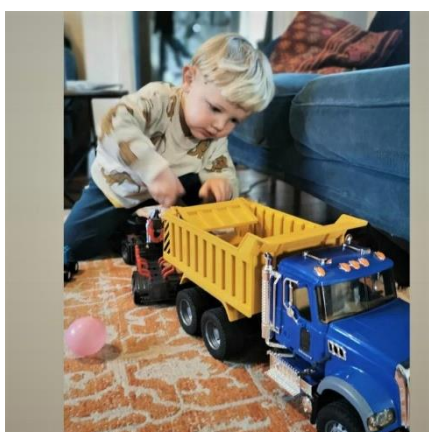
Merry Go Round Toy Library

Merry Go Round Toy Library opened in 1999 in Exeter Scrapstore.

We operate an online booking system. Families and groups are able to browse and reserve toys online ready for collection.

Our service is available for families with children aged from a few months to early teens and for groups or individuals involved in providing care for children.

Toy libraries are exciting places; 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.



How Much Will It Cost?

Family membership £8 per year

Group membership £16 per year

There is a weekly fee for each item borrowed. Rates start at 50p per week for books and toys. More expensive toys from £1.50.



We make no charge for accidental breakages, but do ask for toys to be returned in a clean condition. We do check and clean toys again before they are returned to stock.

Opening Hours

Tuesdays: 10am- 4.30pm

Contact

Tel: 01392 436777

Email:

coordinator@mgrtoylibrary.org

Websites:

my.mgrtoylibrary.org

www.mgrtoylibrary.org

Facebook:

[merrygroundtoylibraries](https://www.facebook.com/merrygroundtoylibraries)

Visit us at

Exeter Scrapstore
Gordon Road
Exeter
EX1 2DH

Visit my.mgrtoylibrary.org to join the toy libraries and book toys to take home.

Members can use either of our toy libraries, but do need to return toys to the library they were borrowed from.



Spinning Top Toy Library

Spinning Top Toy Library is a branch of Merry Go Round. It first opened in March 2018 in The Beacon Centre in Beacon Heath. In March 2020 it closed due to Covid-19 restrictions and reopened in April 2021.

At The Beacon many families choose to stay, chat and play with the toys whilst visiting the Toy Library.

Our Toy Library Manager is Andrea Bristow, who is helped by a Toy Librarian, volunteers and a management committee made up of toy library members.



We provide high quality toys 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.



How Much Will It Cost?

Family membership £8 per year

Group membership £16 per year

There is a weekly fee for each item borrowed. Rates start at 50p per week for books and toys. More expensive toys from £1.50.



We make no charge for accidental breakages, but do ask for toys to be returned in a clean condition. We do check and clean toys again before they are returned to stock.

Opening Hours

Fridays: 10am- 1.00pm

Contact

Email:

coordinator@mgrtoylibrary.org

Websites:

my.mgrtoylibrary.org

www.mgrtoylibrary.org

Facebook:

[merrygoroundtoylibraries](https://www.facebook.com/merrygoroundtoylibraries)

Visit us at

The Beacon Centre
Beacon Lane
Beacon Heath
Exeter EX4 8LZ

We aim to facilitate children's development through play and lend them the best available toys.

Visit my.mgrtoylibrary.org to join the toy libraries, browse the catalogues and book toy to take home.



Volunteers and Committee Members

Volunteers

Everyone who helps our charity in a non-paid capacity is counted as a volunteer, including committee members and Friends of Merry Go Round. Volunteers use their specific skills as and when they feel they can.

Tasks for volunteers include:

- helping with social media and online promotions
- helping to design and distribute publicity materials
- hosting and managing our websites and email accounts
- helping with fundraising and publicity events
- mending or cleaning toys
- sorting donated toys
- organising events and toy sales
- taking photos for publicity

Committee members

Committee members are Trustees of the charity and as such ensure the toy libraries are run in accordance with the law and our Constitution.

Committee members:

- manage the staff, promoting good working practice and conditions
- make decisions about the running of the toy libraries, and make sure our charity is meeting its aims and objectives
- make a commitment to attend meetings, approximately every 2 months, including the AGM and our summer and winter socials
- use their skills to support the toy library - some are officers eg Chair, Treasurer or Secretary, each of which has its own responsibilities
- help with publicity
- link in with everything else going on in the project such as fundraising

For more information, please call us during toy library sessions, email coordinator@mgrtoylibrary.org. or look at our website www.mgrtoylibrary.org.

To join and book toys go to my.mgrtoylibrary.org and for updates and photos visit Facebook page www.facebook.com/merrygoroundtoylibraries

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 all committee members. This involves applying for a DBS and character references.

Chair's Report for the 2023 AGM

It has been a busy year at the Toy Library! As well as lending high quality toys and resources to our members there is always lots going on behind the scenes to ensure that the Toy Library runs well and to spread the word about the service. We are keen for as many local children as possible to have access to the toys and to have fun through play.

Last year we had fun decorating a tree in the Princesshay Charity Christmas Tree Festival for their 10th Anniversary and we're pleased to be taking part again this year. Do visit the trees this Christmas, they are located alongside the former Debenhams in Exeter, they are always decorated very creatively. Here is a photo of some of our team just after we had finished putting on the decorations.



As a committee we do love a social event and this year we visited the Mount Radford Pub for our Christmas get together – in January! It's always January for us. We enjoyed dinner, drinks and taking part in the quiz. We seem to think the Merry Go Round team did quite well in the quiz, we won some money anyway, which we donated to Merry Go Round Toy Libraries. It was a good evening!



In June we enjoyed being part of the Respect Festival. We provided circus skills and a play dough table. Our soft toy tombola is also always very popular. Here is committee member Helene running the tombola.

We always really enjoy taking part in fundraising activities and this year they have included toy sales at children's markets, a pop-up toy sale at the toy library and a collection at Tesco.

A huge thank you goes to our committee for all their hard work. Special thanks go to Fiona, Joy and Helene who spend many hours sorting, cleaning, packaging up and pricing donations for our toy sales. Thanks also to Katy and John, John provides lots of IT support to us and Katy is always on hand to offer and provide her expertise. This year we have also had support from a Duke of Edinburgh student, a funded volunteer from Suez and a young volunteer who helped in the toy library over the Summer each week. Everyone's valuable time and effort means so much.

Andrea has now been at the helm of Merry Go Round Toy Libraries for over a year, we aim to support her now and in the future to further the development of Merry Go Round Toy Libraries. Thank you Andrea for all your hard work this year. Kelly, our Toy Librarian, always welcomes our members with a smile and offers her energy and expertise helping our members to choose fun toys suitable for their interests, age and stage of development; thank you Kelly.

I would like to wish the new committee and Merry Go Round Toy Libraries great success over the coming year and long into the future. **Alex Allan (Chair)**

Toy Library Co-ordinator's Report for the 2023 AGM

It has been great to see and welcome members to the toy library this year. Our toys are being borrowed and enjoyed by babies and children of all ages. We currently have 140 active family and group members representing approximately 500 children. Our toys are popular with families both at home and for parties. Many groups have borrowed our toys this year for local events including churches, preschools and a local parent teacher and friends' association (PTFA.)



With thanks to a Warburtons Community Grant and Councillor Aves, who have provided funding, we have been able to purchase some new wooden sensory toys and replace some of our most worn and loved toys for the toy libraries.

The online booking system continues to work well with over 1400 categorised toys available to choose from. Members also have the option

to drop into our toy libraries and choose toys from the shelves, several families prefer to do this or use a combination of the online/drop in approaches to choosing and booking toys. At Spinning Top there is a comfortable space available for families to stay and play with the toy library toys and many families enjoy this opportunity to play with their child, chat with the staff and play and chat with other families too.

Our staff are on hand during sessions, via email and social media to talk with parents to identify fun toys to help promote development or specific skills. Staff are also able to signpost to other community support and services. As illustrated in the feedback section later in this report, the comments made by parents and group organisers show how much our service and the support provided by our staff is valued.

We have been able to make several outreach visits to local baby and toddler groups thanks to funding provided by Magic Little Grants. We also spent a fun evening at John Lewis displaying some of our toys and chatting with parents-to-be at the 'All Things Baby'



event. These visits have been enjoyable opportunities to spread the word about the toy library service. We are very thankful to Cllr Ruth Williams who provided funding for some fun craft activities for children and their families at The Beacon 'fun days' over the Summer school holidays. These events always prove to be very popular.

We have received many generous donations from families supplying us with toys that have been outgrown in their households. Some of these we use in the Toy Library and others for fundraising sales. Members tell us that they love to think of toys they have donated providing enjoyment to others. The toy library could not exist were it not for our committee and volunteers. It is always rewarding and fun working alongside them so a huge thank you to them all for all that they do! **Andrea Bristow (Toy Library Co-ordinator)**



Treasurer's Report for the 2023 AGM

Financial statement (all figures rounded to nearest pound)

At the end of September 2023, Merry Go Round had a total of £9,144 and Spinning Top had a total of £12,553.

The contingency account has a balance of £4,261, being monies designated to cover redundancy payments in the event the toy libraries have to close, plus statutory costs for sick pay should this be required.

Annual Accounts

The annual accounts for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 were inspected by the Treasurer to check that proper accounting records had been kept and the accounts agreed with the accounting records. We would like to thank Exeter Community Accounting, our payroll provider, for their help and advice.

A copy of the statement of accounts is available for anyone who would like to look at it. The annual return will be submitted to the Charity Commission to be viewed online once the Charity Commission have completed work on their new website. Our total income for last year was £18,728 with an expenditure of £29,121, showing a deficit of £10,393.

The deficit has been caused partly by the large increase in salary costs. We use nationally agreed pay scales and this years' increase was much higher than usual, reflecting the need to pay people a living wage. We also found it necessary to increase staff hours in September 2021 due to the continued difficulty in finding volunteers with time to help with the day-to day running of the toy libraries. At the same time, it has been more difficult to find grants for which we can apply, in the current financial climate, and this has reduced our income compared to previous years. In response to this we have increased our income from fund-raising activities and managed to reduce some of our costs, notably for equipment and utility bills and this has gone some way towards reducing the deficit. Income from toy hire and membership also increased, possibly due to better publicity. It was agreed to increase the membership and toy hire fees, for the first time in 6 years, although this was not implemented until May 2023.

Grants and donations

We would like to offer a big thank you to the following for their support in the financial year 2022-2023;

- Angela Gallagher Memorial Fund
- Local Giving (Magic Little Grants)
- Warburtons Community Grants
- Norman Family Charitable Trust
- YAPP Charitable Trust
- The Gibbons Family Trust
- Ward Grant - Cllr Williams (Exeter City Council)
- Devon Community Foundation (DCF)
- Growing Communities Fund (Devon County Council)

In addition, we would like to offer a big thank you to the following for their support in the financial year 2023-2024 to date;

- Angela Gallagher Memorial Fund
- Local Giving (Magic Little Grants)

- Locality Grant – Cllr Aves (Devon County Council)
- National Lottery Awards for All
- Ward Grant - Cllr Williams (Exeter City Council)
- Hendy Foundation

Nicky Jeffrey (Treasurer)

Merry Go Round Toy Libraries

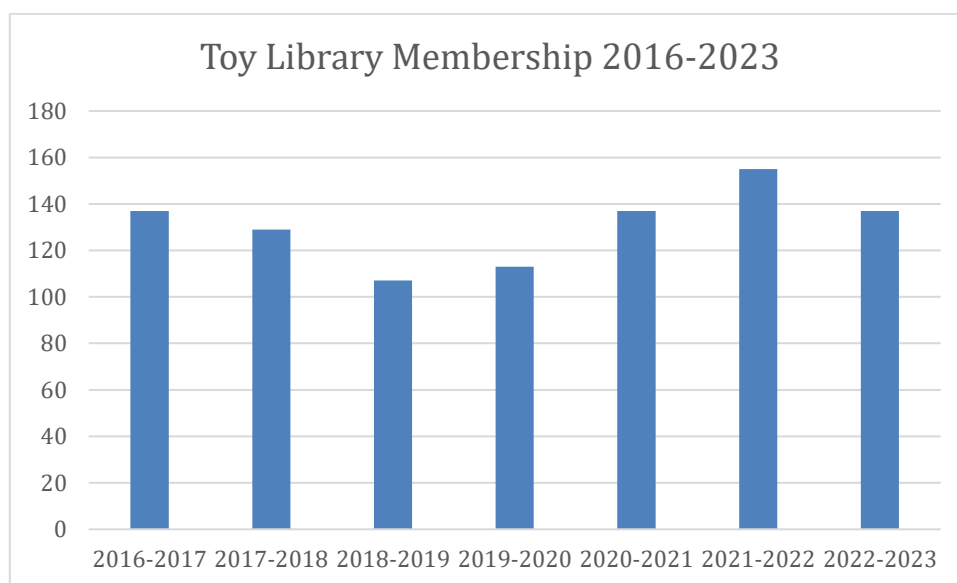
Statistics and Monitoring Information 2023

Memberships

Merry Go Round Toy Library membership allows families and groups to use either or both Merry Go Round and Spinning Top Toy Library therefore it is not possible to differentiate membership numbers between the two libraries.

During the period 1st October 2022 and 30th September 2023 the toy library had 137 members either renew their membership or join. Members were mainly families with 5 group memberships. Monitoring information shows this represented approximately 500 children aged from a few weeks up to 12 years old.

We can see from the graphs below that the number of members joining the Toy Library between 1st October 2022 and 30th September 2023 has decreased slightly from the previous year. Speaking with families we feel this is because many parents are now working additional hours due to the cost-of-living crisis or have returned to work in the office post Covid: families find getting to the toy libraries more challenging. Moving forward we will be making members and potential members aware that a family member or friend is able to collect and return toys on their behalf. We are also investigating collection/drop off points at local groups. We want our service to be as accessible to as many families as possible.



Number of Visits to the Toy Library and Toy Hires

Merry Go Round and Spinning Top each open once per week throughout the year, with the exception of Good Friday and Christmas week.

During the period 1st October 2022 - 30th September 2023 565 visits were made to the toy libraries. Visits refer to the number of bookings/collections made and do not include visits to return toys, to play or to find out more about the services.

During visits members borrowed 1422 toys during the period 1st October 2022 – 30th September 2023, compared to 1381 in the same period the previous year. Each toy hire is calculated for a 2 week period however if a toy is out for 4 weeks it is recorded as 2 hires (2 lots of 2 weeks).

There has been a small increase in toy hire this period showing that our service remains popular, accessible and well used by the local community. The graph below shows a breakdown of toy hire month by month.



Monitoring Information

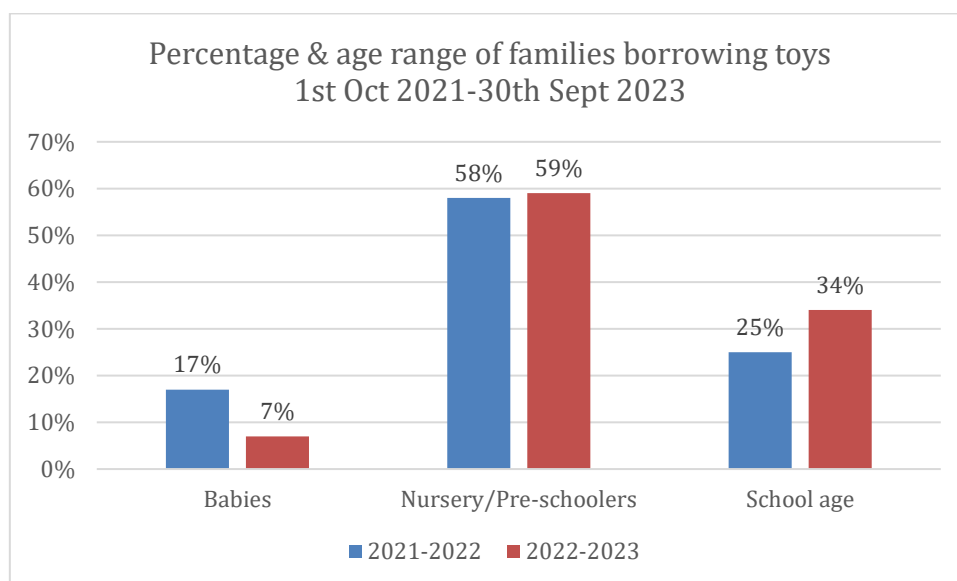
Over the last 12 months we asked family members to fill in monitoring forms. 107 families representing 365 children completed the forms.

Group membership has been used over the past year to support schools and events where many children are present. For analysis purposes we are only able to use information collected from family membership forms as groups were only able to provide partial information on ages, ethnicities and additional needs.

Not all families with membership completed monitoring forms. Analysing completed family membership forms, we can see that of those using our service 33% (122 children) were of school age, 59% (216 children) were of nursery/preschool age and 7% (27 babies) were under 13 months old.

There has been an 9% increase in the percentage of school age children borrowing during the period 1st October 2022 – 30th September 23 compared to the same period the previous year. The percentage of school age children playing with the toys would be higher if we were to include group memberships as they include after school clubs and a Parent Teacher and Friends Association (PTFA). This year we have promoted the range of toys we have for school age children and contacted local schools to ask if they would include information about the toy library in their newsletters. We

have scheduled some further visits to local baby and toddler groups to ensure that new families know about the service we offer.



This information is useful to inform us which types of toys to stock. Many toy libraries only cater for preschool aged children whilst we provide for children of all ages.

Ethnicity Information

We found 61 children (17%) from our sample of family memberships were from minority ethnic backgrounds. These figures do not include group memberships or families who declined to give ethnicity information. We also know some of our families with English as a second language did not complete forms.

The first language of parents included German, Mandarin, French, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, Persian, Arabic and Chichewa. Once again this year we see a different range of first languages which is a reflection of the transient diversity within Exeter and the need for a toy library service to support people who are new to the area. We will continue to make outreach visits over the coming year to let more people know about the toy library service.

Health and Social Needs

We found that children had a range of additional needs including autism, language delay, global delays and a mobility issue caused by hip dysplasia.

Andrea Bristow (Toy Library Co-ordinator)

Members' Feedback Report 2023

During August and September 2023, our members were asked to fill in feedback forms when they visited the toy libraries to find out in what ways, if any, children and families were benefiting from using the toy libraries. We also wanted to hear any ideas for making things even better.

A total of 29 forms were completed by families representing 44 children who have borrowed and played with our toys. The children's ages ranged from a few months to 12 years.

An overwhelming 100% told us that using the toy libraries had helped them find toys which were right for their child's interest and level of development, with 93% saying these had helped their child gain new skills or promoted their development.

- *The Toy Library is a great resource and has enabled me to have more variety of toys and activities for my children*
- *Such a valuable service, I really notice the difference [development] in my daughter*
- *A great resource for my family, we love the games and there is plenty for my 12-year-old too.*
- *I love the idea and the range of toys that are available -it gives us more variety of play.*

83% of parents/carers had gained more knowledge of how their children played at different ages and stages, with 70% saying borrowing our toys had increased the amount of interaction between them and their child.



Almost 93% of our members tell us they have borrowed toys they wouldn't normally have been able to afford to buy or have space in their homes to store. It is our aim to ensure that all children are able to play and have fun regardless of financial background.

- *A brilliant way to allow our children to play with toys we wouldn't normally buy due to space restrictions or cost.*

Over 90% of members now bought fewer toys which is better for the environment, ensuring toys are kept in circulation. Many members have informed us that

they really enjoy using the toy library for its eco-credentials.

- *Love using the toy library – good way of trying out new toys and not buying lots.*
- *Batteries always included with the toys which really helps.*

93% of the members who completed our annual feedback survey told us that they had benefited from talking to staff. We have regular contact with families in person when they collect, choose or return toys as well as through email and social media. At The Beacon many families stay, play and chat which allows our staff to build relationships and get to know individual parents and children.

- *Great service, good range of toys, lovely staff*
- *Thank you for all your support*
- *Lovely, friendly service and clean/well-packaged toys*
- *Kind and welcoming staff.*
- *Great advice*
- *My toddler knows Tuesday is Toy Library day and is always excited!*

Most members (83%) told us that the online booking service is proving easy to use. Glitches do happen and there are some limitations as to what the system can do but overall Lend Engine provides a fantastic non-profit service to our toy library. Our staff are on hand to provide online assistance for those who need it. We do always act on suggestions for improvements where we can.

- *Super browsing facility online,*

We listened to feedback last year and the opportunity for members to stay and play is now available each week at our Spinning Top Toy Library and working well. An increasing number of families are choosing to visit, play and choose toys to take home on the day.

- *Really love coming in and trying new toys on the mat.*



Feedback this year informs us that some members work on the days we open the toy library and as a result are limited to using the service in holiday time only. When making outreach visits we often hear that potential members are unable to get to one of our sessions due to work. We really do want the toy library to be as accessible to as many families as possible. We are currently investigating running pop up collection/drop-off points alongside baby/toddler groups. We are also informing all our members, and potential new members, that friends and family can collect and return toys on their behalf.



- *If the library was open on other days that would be useful*
- *Only thing for me is days/locations, it is often tricky for me to get to the toy library*
- *Only thing that would make it even better would be ability to return items on a different day.*

The feedback provided by our members is always helpful for making improvements. The annual feedback this year gives us confidence that we are meeting our aims and objectives: providing quality toys to local children; helping their development through play and having fun and giving advice and support to parents as needed.

Andrea Bristow (Toy Library Manager)