 Report March 2023-April 2024

Smarties is the church stay-and-play toddler group which meets every Thursday in term time from 10.15 till 11.45 in room four. Anyone who cares for children age 0-4 is welcome with their children. We play, drink tea, eat snacks, chat, laugh, sing, rhyme and enjoy being together.

As I look back over another year of coordinating Smarties once again I do so with gratitude. My lovely team of 7 and I have set up, welcomed, celebrated, listened, chatted, built community, and watched babies grow to toddlers and toddlers grow in confidence and progress to pre-school. Mum’s, Dads and grandparents have shared frustrations, sadnesses and joyous stories as well as supported one another through the ups and downs of life with a young family! We have an average of 25-30 families a week.

It has been great to have Robbie with us on team this year. I really have appreciated his service week by week, as have many of the families. The children love playing playdough and reading stories with him. Simon has now become a regular feature with his guitar. He brings alot of energy and another important link between Holy Trinity, Smarties and Chance Street school. Sarah, our very own children’s worker, is offering Smarties lots of support and brings another valuable connection between the community and Holy Trinity.

Here are some of my team’s reflections on what has been a highlight for them this past year at Smarties.

“I love the opportunity to be a channel for God's unconditional love and peace .”

“I really like the way that families have a first experience of the church and God. It means a lot to people. Often parents are emotional when its time to move on as their child heads to nursery or school, which shows how much the group means to them.”

“A highlight for me in the kitchen is seeing the faces of the little ones smiling hopefully at me through the hatch and the opportunity to engage with the adults as they come for their teas and coffees!”

“To watch a shy nervous step change, through a smile, to eager confident joy!”

“More families being open and receptive to Christian input for example the Christmas service, offers of prayer and words of testimony.”

“Being able to talk to the parents or listen if they need someone to, singing time is always a highlight seeing lots of little smiles”

As a team we have termly breakfasts with church families who come to Smarties. We meet to encourage one another, share ideas and pray. At one of these it was encouraging to hear from a parents’ perspective that Smarties is really valued and enjoyed.

For me I can’t pick one high light, but it is such a privilege to share life with these young families in our community. Seeing them and valuing them week by week. Getting to know the adults and children. I’m so grateful to God for opportunities to bring encouragements and give courage to many of these families. My team and I are often coming up with ways (which I believe are inspired by God and the holy spirit) to introduce biblical words of truth, to share a thought, a verse, testimony, or celebrate a Christian festival. Christmas is always a highlight for us at Smarties as we craft and sing our way through the Christmas story. However, it was an amazing gift to be able to dance and sing in church one Thursday morning as we celebrated Jesus, king of kings and being born as a baby. Then to have the puppets tell the Christmas story through song and the journey to Bethlehem. Everyone joined us. At Easter we made a lovely little Easter pot which had all the important bits of Easter incorporated into it.

Do you remember the sheep that Andrea and I lost at the last Tewkesbury big Weekend! This was then followed by an amazing puppet show after the parade which was well received by many Smarties families and the community. Thank you God!. This year Smarties will be joining with TJC and trinity praisin puppets along the circus theme. Watch out for unicycles and God as the ringmaster! Come and join us on 18th May at the Tewkesbury big weekend parade. Kate has written an amazing song especially for the occasion.

“The ringmaster is always near the centre of it all, he holds us in his gentle hands and lifts us when we fall, he welcomes us with open arms and guides us through the storm, life can be a circus the master will transform.”

I have been so encouraged by the national play time conference run by care for the family. Last September Isla and I, at the conference, were encouraged not to underestimate the importance of toddler groups for both parents and the children. It was great to look at God’s ways of being with children and children's ways of being with God. This September there are 6 of us going to Bradford for the conference which will be very exciting. I look forward to sharing next year the things we have learnt and implemented!

Thanks to the welcome table where some smarties families continue to enjoy community and a free meal cooked for them, something that is much appreciated.

So that’s Smarties. Thank you for your prayer and support. Please pray for us as we seek to serve the community and find creative ways to serve the young families of Tewkesbury and share God’s love with them. If you are interested in joining the team or finding more out about Smarties please do not hesitate to chat to myself or Sarah.

Pray for

The Smarties team, Rach Elliott, Andy Beadle, Sarah Banelli, Andrea Duncan, Emma Hancox, Robbie Palmer, Simon Phillips, Joy Thomas and Kate Wyatt.

Pray for others to join the team, especially in September as others of the team move on.

The challenge of the new door policy

Tewkesbury big weekend

The Smarties families

Ongoing links with those who have left to remain connected to Holy Trinity through other family events.

For Smarties families to continue to enjoy the welcome table and all the support and community that brings.

Wisdom and creativity as we share testimony and bible verses and biblical truths through craft, celebrating Christian festivals and singing time.