

ST MARY THE VIRGIN RIVERHEAD WITH DUNTON GREEN

TOTS AND TODDLERS ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

The last time the group met was on Monday 23rd March, a date which will be etched on all our memories, as that evening, when we saw the words Stay at Home – Save Lives – Help the NHS on our television screens, we began a period of months at home in lockdown. It is difficult at this point in time to envisage a situation when we can start meeting again safe in the knowledge that we are offering a welcoming and secure environment for our parents, babies, children and volunteers. Suffice it to say that we will do our very best to do so as soon as the situation allows, so that with God's help we may continue to offer our outreach to the communities of Riverhead, Dunton Green and beyond.

In life before lockdown, Tots and Toddlers continued to be a place of welcome and fun for children up to 4 years of age where the mothers are able to enjoy the social interaction together while the children play with the numerous toys.

The Group has been going in its current format for about 13 years having developed from a church group called Angels and Imps where it was intended to reach out into the community of parents and young children not necessarily from a church background. It continues to be very popular with mothers, fathers, grandparents and child minders/nannies from the community of Riverhead and Dunton Green and beyond. It is lovely to watch the children in their various stages of growth from babyhood, to toddlers learning to walk and then on to pre-school. We quite often see the younger siblings doing likewise.

It is particularly satisfying when we see some of the families coming into church for the first time, may be to the family service, which happens once a month, or some of the children joining the Sunday Club group to learn more about the story of Jesus. There have also been several baptisms which have happened as a result of the Tots & Toddlers Group. We pray it continues to flourish and more people will come to learn about God's love.

We have a regular group of willing volunteers who prepare the hall with toys and craft for the various age groups. Sometimes we have a predominance of babies and not many toddlers, or sometimes more girls than boys, but we manage to cater for them all. The playdough, home made by our specialist playdough maker, Diane Williams, is always very popular, as is the colouring table, which usually has a different theme each week to accompany the singing at the end. Daphne Harrison plays the piano which is a great help to the children as they sing all sorts of songs and nursery rhymes, which they greatly enjoy. There is also a craft table for older children, where they can make different 3D pictures, mobiles to hang in their bedrooms and even grow cress, amongst other things. It is especially good for the children to play together and learn some socialising skills. There is also a snug corner with blankets and soft toys for the very little babies and their mums, where they are safe from the rest of the group.

While the children are playing, the grown-ups are able to enjoy a hot or cold drink with biscuits and sometimes cake, where they are able to chat in a safe and caring environment.

I think we can safely say that all our willing volunteers thoroughly enjoy their time getting to know the children and the mums/carers. Thank you to all who give their time and energy week by week, and as mentioned in last year's report, long may it continue

Even though the children are never left alone with any of our volunteers, as parents and carers are always with their children during the session, we duly follow safeguarding procedures and guidelines given by the Diocese at all times and always have due regard to these safeguarding guidelines. Diane Williams, Margaret Holman and Ronnie Todd all have up to date DBS checks in place.

It goes without saying that we are always in need of more pairs of willing hands, so if anyone has a couple of hours to spare on a Monday afternoon, between 1.00 and 3.45pm, do pop into the church hall, that's when we're up and running again of course; you will be very welcome!

The Tots and Toddlers Team
2019-2020