



## Report to Abingdon Town Council: March 2025

### Objectives and Activities

Abingdon Carousel Family Centre is a charity which was set up to run services in the former county council funded South Abingdon Children's Centre. When OCC withdrew funding, Carousel was incorporated as a charity and is now in its sixth year of offering services to local families.

Carousel offers a variety of recreational, care, educational and adult development services both directly to the public using paid employees and volunteers and through making the building available to community focussed partner organisations. All Carousel activities are free to families although we encourage small donations where these can be afforded.

Service priorities are those which benefit families with children aged 0-5 years although other family and community services are also offered under an umbrella approach that aims to be relevant to the community as a whole. Carousel is an inclusive organisation that aims to reflect the views and needs of our families.

#### ***Specifically, Carousel aims to:***

- Provide a range of facilities and programmes, through the provision of a safe and stimulating space, for children to socialise, learn and play and for parents / carers to receive guidance and support.
- Support parents / carers in developing skills and strategies for effective parenting.
- Enable parents / carers to engage in a range of opportunities to meet other families, undertake personal development activities and become active members of the community, so reducing isolation.
- Provide a community hub from which partner organisations can offer their services.
- Provide information and signposting so that families can access services across the wider community.

### Achievements and Performance

Our focus this year has been on consolidation of existing good practice and extending and improving the quality and range of services on offer. Drop-in 'Stay and Play' sessions are held on five days of the week (including the very popular Saturday Club) and are frequently full. Around 500 families are now registered at Carousel, compared with 150 two years ago. We also now offer dedicated monthly SEND sessions.

In the period from September to December 2024, 85 new families registered and 1,512 attended a Stay and Play session. 73% of families registered live within Abingdon; most of the remainder come from the surrounding villages.

As well as sessions for families, we have also continued to develop our parent / carer support and development programme. Courses have been offered under the Family Links umbrella and we have worked with partners to offer 'Communication through Play' courses and a 'School Readiness Course'.

In addition to our own sessions, we work with a range of partners, and this extends the use of the centre. The Health Visitors offer regular sessions, and we have been happy to host Holiday Play Schemes for young people with disabilities. We have collaborated with Oxfordshire Play Association to participate in community play activity days. As important as the specific sessions on offer are the extent to which staff have worked with individual families and County Council and community teams to advise and support, especially in times of crisis. This has ranged from individualised support for parents struggling with the bureaucracy associated with SEND issues to supporting emergency rehoming needs.

***Carousel's 3-year Improvement Plan (2023 – 2026) focuses on three priority areas:***

**1. Finance**

Ensure that successful fundraising and efficient financial management lead to a balanced budget and robust reserves

**2. Leadership and Management**

Develop systems that ensure legal compliance and best practice in leadership and management

**3. Provision and services**

Ensure that the quality of provision and services is of a consistently high quality. Sessions for children reflect Early Years Foundation Stage best practice and other services meet the expressed and identified needs of our users.

The focus in Year One of the Plan (2023 – 24) was on immediate needs regarding ensuring legal compliance in all aspects of the management and running of the Centre, fund-raising and financial efficiency, manager, staff and trustees' development and the development of partnerships. Trustees evaluated progress through the Improvement Plan in July 2024 and concluded that excellent progress has been made in all aspects, mainly due to inspirational and effective leadership by the manager and the high quality of the staff team (ably supported by committed and skilled volunteers). The theme for year two of the plan is on 'Consolidation' with specific focus on ongoing improvement of provision and services (both through our core offer and effective partnerships) and ensuring that robust fund-raising leads to a balanced budget and increased reserves.

During the last year, there have been significant stresses affecting forward planning. Caldecott School has relinquished responsibility for provision of services to Carousel and we are currently in discussion with Oxfordshire County Council (our landlords) regarding the renewal of the lease and agreement of service charges. We are hopeful that our new lease, which gives us full tenancy of the whole building, will be signed very shortly. This is an exciting time for Carousel as the increased space will provide an opportunity to extend our core services as well as activities provided through partnerships with other organisations. However, this is not without its stresses as with the increased space will come increased costs. Our short-term objective, once the lease has been signed, is to redecorate and equip the new playroom and also develop the adjacent outdoor space to make an exciting and safe play space.

Our Manager, Georgina Hicks, moved on to a new post in July 2024. It has proved difficult to recruit a suitable manager but in the interim, staff and trustees have risen to the challenge and have been taking on additional leadership and management responsibilities. Despite these pressures, morale remains high with staff, volunteers and

trustees fully committed to ensuring that Carousel remains at the hub of its community, providing essential and highly valued services to families across Abingdon and beyond.

## **Financial Summary**

Our total income for the year ending July 2024 was £110,894. The total expenditure was £91,725. The unrestricted deficit for the year ended 31 July 2024 was £499. The Trustees are pleased that, given the cost-of-living crisis, the charity has been able to show a breakeven position and forecast at least a further breakeven position for the year ended 31 July 2025.

Carousel is reliant on external donations and room hire income. A small amount of income is generated by donations from those families that attend sessions. Abingdon Town Council is our largest donor, and we are extremely grateful for the security towards core costs that this provides. We aim to keep 6 months running costs (approximately £44,000) in reserve to mitigate against crisis. Trustees are constantly looking for creative approaches to fund raising.

Sharron Jenkinson: Chair of Trustees

11 March 2025