



## **Report from the Chair of Trustees of Abingdon Carousel**

**Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021**

**To be considered at the AGM to be held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022**

At the start of our year in August 20 we mistakenly thought we were coming out of the Covid crisis but, as we now all know, there was plenty more to come!

Socially distanced sessions had started in September but, following government guidance to lockdown in November, Carousel stopped social sessions but offered one-to-one support sessions to vulnerable families which were a lifeline to those who needed us the most.

Saturday Club continued to provide the popular singing, story and activity videos on Facebook. Families followed either live or picked them up later in the week as it suited them. These videos remain on Facebook for anyone who wants to look at them and incidentally these also projected a positive image of Carousel showing funders and the wider community what we get up to.

Meanwhile, during November, staff were able to take training courses in both PEEPLE and Family Links disciplines which helped them to plan new sessions with increased learning content for both parents and children.

Socially distanced sessions were finally able to start again from April 19<sup>th</sup> and 3 sessions a week were usually fully booked with families relieved to be able to get out and meet others again. One to one sessions with vulnerable families continued and also specific support to families with SEND children was started, for example helping a family to apply for Disability Living Allowance.

In 2021 we had some staff turnover with one going on maternity leave at the end of the year and another leaving in April. We were lucky enough to retain the ad hoc services of Kelly Stacey to deal with any vulnerable families with SEND specific needs, even though she moved on to a full-time job elsewhere at the end of the year. At the end of the year we interviewed for two new playworker posts which were successfully filled ready for the new term to bring our staff back up to strength.

The Trustees spent the year keeping a close eye on the financial picture, with concerns about the loss of room hire income which was clearly going to continue for some time to come. In January we welcomed Mark Rusher officially to the board and also Sharron Jenkinson, a new Trustee who brought with her a wealth of experience in the education sector. This consoled us for the loss of our good friend, Monica Lovatt, a supporter of Carousel since the early days, who had resigned at the end of 2020. Penny Clover stepped up to take the Vice Chairmanship and starred for us in the Town Council promotional video made in March.

To replace lost room-hire fees, which in previous years had contributed around £10,000 of income, the Trustees decided to target the many small grant schemes which had been either newly set up, or their criteria widened, in response to the Covid crisis. Penny Clover, Honorary Fundraiser as well as Vice Chair, tackled the challenge with extraordinary energy and, in quick succession, pulled in grants from the Doris Field Trust, Lennox Hannay Trust, Oxfordshire Community Foundation, the Cumber Trust, to name a few. We also secured grants from the Councillor Covid Relief fund and Abingdon Community Church. Our Manager obtained a grant from Waitrose as well as co-ordinating some room hires through a very tricky period of extra cleaning and social distancing so that in the end room hire income did contribute over £800 for the year. Our outlook became slightly less pessimistic as we realised we were often hitting our monthly target of £1000.

In March, we successfully applied for money from Councillor Neil Fawcett's Councillor Priority Fund and were able as a result to improve the efficiency of our office, bringing in a faster, smarter photocopier which also runs at a fraction of the cost per copy of the old one. It was an investment for the future which will mean we can affordably provide course packs for parents attending Family Links and other sessions.

In April we were able to hold a Garden Tidy Up Day along with a plant and book sale. It was a great opportunity to meet community volunteers and in particular our friends from Northcourt Co-Op. Penny had created a strong connection with this business; a second-hand book sale in their store brought in weekly donations and we were a chosen local charity that Co-Op members could give their points to. At the Garden Tidy Up Day, Co-Op staff painted the fence and weeded the car park border, some of us got covered in paint whilst refurbishing the funders crayon display, whilst the Mayor and various other volunteers dug weeds out of the planters. The sun shone down and we all began to feel like life might just be returning to normal!

Meanwhile, inspired by the Family Links training in particular, staff proposed to Trustees that a step-change in services should be planned for the post-Covid period including increased content in the general sessions and adding Family Links courses to really drive a long-term change in family lives. The Chair put together a funding bid to Garfield Weston Foundation and this was successful with a £7500 grant being awarded just before the end of the year. This meant that we did not see the much-dreaded loss of many thousands of pounds and just fell short of breaking even, although it should be noted that the work which this grant will be funding will mainly take place in the year 2021-22.

In such a difficult year, to have continued to support families, especially the most vulnerable, and to have emerged with £57 000 of income and a breakeven position? I feel that we should count that as a good effort on the part of staff and Trustees and a good outcome in the circumstances. As ever we thank the local individuals who support us month in and month out with a regular donation into our bank account. Under GDPR we do not give personal details but you know who you are and thank you so much for your continued support.

*Heather Brown*

Chair of Trustees, Abingdon Carousel

25<sup>th</sup> January 2022