**Chair’s Annual Report**

**CHIPS**

**AGM 2023**

**October 2022-September 2023**

**Thank yous:**

My first task is to say a huge CHIPS’ THANK YOU to everyone who works for, volunteers for, raises money for or otherwise supports CHIPS. It is you who make CHIPS the special charity that it is.

However, I would like to give a special mention to:

* Anita Ash, Lauren Clayden, Karen Lavers and Kerry Viccars who keep the CHIPS Office going and deal with all the problems thrown their way. A special mention for Lauren who has calmly and efficient taken on many of the jobs Sophie used to cover,
* Sarah Deans who volunteers in the office as well as at the Ware Playscheme and CHIPS Cookery Club,
* Karen Lavers who has once again been a star as our Volunteer Co-ordinator, and Playleader at Ware, and Leader of the teens Club, and Leader of the Craft Club and Deputy Leader of the Cookery Club. So many jobs – and always with a smile – a real CHIPS star,
* Wendy Tucker who once again organises wages for all CHIPS staff across all our settings with such great skill and care. CHIPS would be lost without you,
* Teresa Ivison and Helen Smith for all their hard work reviewing policies to ensure that they are up to date, such an important task,
* Matt Cooper for his wise advice as a Trustee and whose IT skills keeps our systems and website in good shape,
* Rita Adams and Jo Edwards for your continuing help with our finances. A solid financial system which keeps CHIPS going,
* Our marvellous fundraising team lead by the super Hazel Smith – Alison Spagnolletti, Karen Slater, Michele Nicholson, Helen Smith and Neil Amphlett – CHIPS would not be here without you,
* Simon Tatum who continues to use his knowledge and experience to keep a close eye on CHIPS finances and make sure we budget prudently,

Last, and most certainly not least, can say another huge CHIPS’ THANK YOU to every member of staff who works at a CHIPS’ Playscheme and/or CHIPS’ Club. You are the face of CHIPS. I appreciate your effort and hard work ensuring that all children who attend are safe and have the best time; so that parents/carers are reassured that their child is well cared for, regardless of any support needs.

**Goodbyes:**

August saw the departure of Sophie Johnson, our Administrative Officer. Sophie had worked in the CHIPS office and helped at the Ware summer playscheme since February 2020, originally with Helen, Karen and Gill. We send her our best wishes and good luck for the future.

**Christmas Parties:**

The Christmas Parties were funded by grants from local County Councillors through their Locality Budgets and we are very grateful for their support. All the parties were all visited by Santa Claus with a present for every child.

The Playleaders reported -

* **Bishop’s Stortford** - Our Christmas party was a lot of fun with 30 children attending. We bought a Christmas Tree and ceiling decorations, so the Scout Hut looked quite festive for the party! We also bought wooden tree decorations for the children to colour and hang on the tree before the entertainer arrived. We decorated our sensory tent as Santa’s grotto. All the children were very appreciative of their presents.
* **Cheshunt -** Our children loved the build up to Christmas. They loved decorating biscuits, wrapping boxes for friends and planning a talent show to show their friends.
* **Hertford-** The Christmas parties were reasonably quiet. Next year parents will be reminded of the dates, so that no child misses out. The entertainer was not as successful as others that have attended in the past, but the children still had a great time.
* **Hoddesdon**-The Christmas party was great. We had Magic Mark and his disco and then our resident Santa came to see all the children. Santa crept round the woods so the children could see him arriving in the distance – they were ecstatic. Staff filled lunchboxes with a Christmas snack and we had crackers for the children to pull. A game of parcel the parcel was great fun too.
* **Waltham Cross -** The children really enjoyed their Christmas party seeing Santa and having endless fun with the soft play activities and bouncy castle.
* **Ware** –We finished the term with our Christmas Party. We had entertainment from Sally Squiggles and then individual Christmas party boxes of party food. We did as we have done for the last couple of years and set up a Santa’s grotto. Parents were invited in when their child saw Santa so they could take a photo then leave through the playground. There were a lot of children but it all ran smoothly.

**Christmas Playschemes**

Once again we ran playschemes across East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne. The Playleaders reported -

* **Bishops Stortford -** The biggest challenge was staffing, having a Playleader off sick and a couple of volunteers cancel sessions. However, overall, the scheme was a success – happy children that for the most part played very well together. Children loved having play dough out and making ‘pizzas’. The children enjoyed making presents out of junk modelling and wrapping them up! As always outside play was very popular but was made tricky by disappointing weather.
* **Cheshunt & Waltham Cross -** Christmas play scheme ran well. The children loved having the bouncy castle out. Junk modelling and painting was very popular, as usual. On the second day the scheme had a trip to the local pantomime, which the children fully participated in and all had a great time.
* **Hertford -** The staff ran Christmas themed baking and craft activities. Room was available for some inside sports for the more boisterous children as the weather was very wet. The bouncy castle kept breaking down, which was very frustrating for some children. The scheme also had a trip to see a pantomime which was a success. The children who attended really enjoyed it and were, on the whole, really well behaved.
* **Hoddesdon -** Staff took the children on the bus to the local theatre to see the pantomime - Beauty and The Beast. Some of the children had never been on the bus before, so it was a great adventure for them. Other activities included making cookies and flapjacks, and painting pots which were filled with bulbs for spring. Lots of outside play, especially football.
* **Ware -** Children from the Ware scheme also attended a pantomime -The Snowsmith. Lots of ‘snow‘ and the children were enthralled by the puppets. The scheme had a large new tricycle and an iPad. The tricycle was well used by the children who ventured out in the cold. The iPad has proved invaluable with Peppa Pig videos and games. Various seasonal craft activities were also available in addition to all the usual activities.

**Easter Playschemes**

The biggest challenge at Easter was the lack of staffing which limited the number of sessions offered to some children. Funding, however, allowed for each scheme to have a trip out or extra entertainers into sessions. These included -

* Wild ‘n’ Wacky (soft play) and pets’ corner in Harlow,
* Trip to indoor Bowling,
* Train trip to London with lunch at McDonalds (don’t tell Ofsted!),
* Visit by Rocky and his collection of animals who the children always love to see,
* Party with our favourite entertainer.

CHIPS’ staff provided lots of Easter craft activities, cooking and Easter Egg and scavenger hunts. The good weather meant that there was lots of outside play.

The Ware scheme held an open afternoon inviting all the families to join in with an Easter Egg hunt and they provided refreshments for the parents. This proved to be a brilliant opportunity for parents to meet up and chat together.

Two of the Charity’s bouncy castles are showing signs of wear and were unreliable during the playschemes. Funding will be sought to replace them.

**Summer Playschemes**

The summer is usually CHIPS’ busiest time and this year was no different. The Playleaders reported -

* **Bishop’s Stortford** - Even though the weather was not particularly good during the scheme, continuous free flow between the inside and outside space was still possible due to the undercover area.

Activities that the children really enjoyed were:- threading beads with pipe cleaners, water play, including a water fight! trikes, messy play, the ballpool and sand pit. The children also enjoyed making watermelon pizzas for snack and decorating biscuits.

The Mayor of Bishop’s Stortford, a member from the Wooden Spoon Charity and local press visited to formally open the new storage shed, which had been funded by the Wooden Spoon Charity. A little party was organised for the children.

Several external entertainers came to the playscheme to run sessions. The children loved the circus skills and have requested some new equipment, so that they can practice their new skills. The children were very excited when the petting zoo arrived, they loved walking the goats, getting to hold each animal and bathing the ducks.

* **Cheshunt and Waltham Cross** -The children and staff from the Waltham Cross scheme joined with the Cheshunt scheme again this summer.

The bouncy castle was used every day as the children really enjoy this. A petting zoo, face painting, a party with Sally Squiggles and a visit by an ice cream van where the children’s favourite activities. A great day was had at Paradise Wildlife Park, seeing all the animals and using the soft play area.

Staff organised the children planting pots of bulbs for them to take home to their parents. Much sticky fun was also had decorating biscuits with different colours of icing. The massive sand pit was enjoyed by all the children.

* **Hertford -** A number of new families joined this summer including a last minute emergency placement of children. Staffing levels were good but there was a shortage of volunteers.

The theme for week one was Summer Fun, which included making sea themed cupcakes, enjoying a visit from the ice cream van and making sand art pictures. The staff ran a science day and the scheme had a visit from the Mayor of Hertford. The highlight of the week was a trip to Ware Lido and then an afternoon in the Priory Park. The children were impeccable behaved and socialised with members of the public.

For week two the theme was Best of Britain. Activities were making red, white and blue chocolate bark, playing traditional games including boules and making models of famous London landmarks. A trip out to Westmill Farm included Foot-Pool and then the afternoon at Woody’s Playbarn.

The Leaders chose the theme of Animal Antics for the final week. Activities included each child painting a ceramic bowl, making gingerbread cake in the microwave and decorating it with images of their favourite animals, making animal keyrings, snake mobiles and a range of animal masks. A visit to Paradise Wildlife Park was as popular as always.

It was very evident that this year the children were interacting with each other independently. Children that usually kept to themselves were joining in with football matches and bike races etc. This was so wonderful to see.

* **Hoddesdon** - During week one, the scheme visited Rye-Assic in Hoddesdon. The children enjoyed the soft play inside then the trampolines outside. Lunch was eaten in the park, once the geese had been shooed away! This was followed by time playing on the swings and slides. On the next day the children enjoyed a quick visit by the fire engine and crew, who had too rush off to an emergency call out. The school kindly allowed the scheme access to the sports hall, so the bouncy castle could be used inside as the weather was rather wet.

Week two was fun with the children enjoying glitter tattoos and face paint most days. There was sewing activities and making Shrinkies. The trip to the local park was cancelled due to wet weather, so the scheme had a movie and popcorn afternoon. Cakes were baked ready to welcome parents for a tea and cake afternoon. Lots of parents attended and chatted with each other. As this afternoon was such a success, we plan to repeat it next year.

Week three included more glitter tattoos and face paint, plus painting unicorns’ pictures with watercolours and a visit by the ice cream van. A trip to Paradise Wildlife Park was enjoyed by all especially as the sun was shining.

* **Ware -** This summer the scheme stayed at Kingshill School as the usual venue was not available. This limited the space for bikes and bigger indoor items, plus use of the bouncy castle.

Visitors to the scheme this year included: - a Lego Builders workshop, a Soft Play activity, Face Painting and Sally Squiggles for the end of scheme party. A visit by Police Officers was a great hit. The officers were very approachable and chatted to the children for ages. An outing to Paradise Wildlife Park was very successful. Seeing all the animals, as well as enjoying the dinosaurs park and play area.

We organised craft activities cooking, scooters, some bikes and a stomp rocket which were very popular. New toys included more scooters, a Duplo marble run set and some dolls which were all very much enjoyed.

**Saturday Schemes**

CHIPS runs playschemes on Saturdays during school term time. Once again they were busy -

* **Bishop’s Stortford –** A lot of staff-led activities were organised. For example - cutting up fruit inspired by the Hungry Caterpillar story, making Mother’s Day and Valentines Day cards. Finger painting and choosing poems also proved popular. The scheme celebrated the King’s Coronation with a party including balloons, themed snacks and a treasure hunt. For Father’s Day, the children made hand-print trophies and medals.

Groups games - swing ball, digging together, ‘tarmacing’ the path and using cones to create a construction area and basketball regular activities. Outdoor messy play is always very popular, especially if it included water. Water play with the guttering is one of the children’s favourite activities as well as a chance to send the cars down the chute and cleaning them with cloths and soapy water.

New ride on cars and magnetic building blocks (lots of towers and rockets!), have kept lots of children busy. While new dressing up clothes lead to creative games like witches and doctors. The new sensory toys are being well used.

In April the scheme relocated to Avanti Meadows School. The school has been recently built and offers state of the art disabled access and changing facilities, which were lacking at the previous setting. The scheme is using the Nursery accommodation and outside enclosed play area. The move to the new school went well with very positive feedback from families. The outside area with the wooden climbing frame and slide is loved by the children as well as the tarmac area for ride on toys.

* **Cheshunt -** At the Cheshunt Playscheme the children also love to be outdoors, taking part in nature related activities - bug hunts, collecting leaves for craft projects, etc. Messy trays are also popular. The Cheshunt scheme has admitted several younger children 3+ and have enjoyed providing activities for this age group again which link in the EYFS and observations.

The children continue to enjoy creating talent shows, to perform to each other and playing the musical keyboard. Arts and crafts are very popular especially at Halloween and Christmas. Free flow snack is still working well. The children love coming in and catching up with friends whilst eating. They take it in turns to help set up the table and offer drinks to others.

* **Hertford -** The scheme has seen a number of changes in the children attending, as a few of the teenage boys have outgrown the scheme and said goodbye. The staff received some wonderful messages from parents thanking them for the playscheme for helping their children to feel included and giving them the chance to socialise with others. A number of new families have joined the sessions.

Weekly themes involve cooking sessions and using as much of the outside as possible. The Chinese New Year windchimes, and the bird gliders when thinking about Spring, where very popular activities. The older boys have enjoyed den building with the soft bricks and also putting together talent shows. There had been some problems with the premises and parking, but these have now been resolved.

* **Hoddesdon** - The scheme has welcomed some new children, staff and volunteers. The children are always happy to come to sessions to meet up with their friends and see all the staff. Outdoor play is enjoyed by all, especially games of football. The staff regularly organise cooking sessions, including cooking sausages outdoors in the wooded area. The move to new premises has proved to be very successful.
* **Waltham Cross -** We have a new leadership team at this setting which is working well. Popular activities are role play using the onsite playhouses, hide and seek, bicycles and art work. A new storage shed has allowed for new bikes, scooters and outdoor games to be purchased.

The number of staff and volunteers continues to grow, allowing for new children to be invited to attend. For holiday playschemes the setting joins up with the Cheshunt scheme. It is hoped that in the future funding will be available, so that we can run a separate playscheme.

* **Ware -** The Playleadersends a text the night before to remind the families that their child has a place at the session the next day. This reminder has helped to increase attendance and, if the child cannot attend, then the session can be reallocated.

Outdoor play takes place during every session, whatever the weather, as some children are not fazed by adverse weather. The scheme has scooters and balls that the children play with, as well as the onsite climbing frame and outdoor play areas. Quite a few children have made friends with each other at CHIPS, so are booked in to attend at the same sessions to enable them to play together.

A craft activity is available, with seasonal options when appropriate.  Some children like specific toys and activities (eg trains, toy kitchen, parachute) plus puzzles and books and Duplo. The Duplo compatible marble run is very popular. The scheme also has a Wii, DVD player and iPad which are used on and off by various children.

**CHIPS’ Activity Clubs**

CHIPS continues to run activity clubs, mainly for the older children, who have outgrown the playscheme sessions. These clubs enable the children and young people to focus on one activity.

* **Climbing Club -** This year the club has tried a couple of new activities - crate stacking and high adventure. Both were eagerly received and proved to be a good team building exercises. Indoor climbing remains the core activity, especially during the winter months, with the youngsters challenging themselves to attempt different graded climbs.

Attendance has been good with 8 to 10 children at each session, which has allowed for the children to make friends. A few children left the group making way for some new faces. The club has also had a new member of staff.

The children continue playing Top Trumps whilst waiting their turn. This builds on securing friendships and cohesion between them. Their behaviour has been outstanding.

* **Cookery Club -** The group has a team of staff and children who attend on a regular basis. They make a savoury dish one week with a pudding /cake the following session. The children would make chocolate cake every week if they had the chance! Basic straight forward recipes are chosen so the children can get really involved, whilst some children work independently. Every week the children try the example made by the Leader, it is always their favourite part of the session.

The club has also just moved to different premises, which are more organised and easier to use.

* **Computer Club -** The club has experienced a dip in the number of youngsters attending but is now back to capacity. In the summer two members, who turned twenty, had to leave. One of the youngsters, had developed greatly over the 15 months that he had attended, whilst learning English, his computer skills and confidence had grown.

The Wii continues to be the most used console. The range of games being played has grown quite considerably, with more open world games such as Planet Coaster and Planet Zoo, as well as Universe Sandbox, where players can build their own universe in space. Minecraft has remained a staple, as has Wii Sports and FIFA.

* **Craft Club -** Craft Club has been running for just over a year. It has taken time to build up membership, but there are now ten children who attend and an average of eight children each session. It has become a very relaxed, social group, with a regular staff team, that work brilliantly together and have formed great relationships with the children.

The club has a theme for every session and a variety of activities related to that theme are on offer. In addition, children can choose to make anything they wish from the boxes of materials provided. A lot of children like having a planned activity, whilst some like the freedom to make their own thing. Individual activities can be requested by the children following their interests and likes.

* **Teen Club -** TheTeen club runs every month with extra sessions in the holidays. There is a great group of teens and staff and the club is working really well. Activities over the year have included: making amazing pottery moons at the ArtShed in Ware, a trip to see the Super Mario Movie, Laser tag and trampolining (which is always a big favorite). Over the summer the trips included: playing Crazy Golf, taking part in a treasure hunt, bowling and visiting a farm. There will be a canal boat trip in September, sponsored by a grant from Alpkit. The main purpose of the group remains to offer the opportunity for children to socialise with their peers and learn life skills.
* **Model Railway Club -** The CHIPS Railway club meets once a month on a Saturday morning at the Hoddesdon Model and Railway club. Generally between 4 and 5 youngsters attend each session. Some new children have joined this year and enjoy the relaxed sessions, where they can come and go or stay for the whole 90-minute session. The parents stay and have built up a rapport with each other and the club members giving everyone a chance to chat and socialise with each other.

In the past year the Model Railway Club have built a new large wooden cabin - ‘Top Shed’ that houses the sit on trains, a workshop, storage areas and an indoor space where train layouts can be set for the children to play with. This is in addition to the Hornby sets that are set up in the main clubhouse.

The club has sit on trains which the children love riding on. Model boats are often available on the boating lake too.

CHIPS is very grateful to the members of the club for continuing to welcome our families to their sessions.

**Notifiable Event:**

There has been no notifiable event.

**Volunteers:**

On average over the year CHIPS had 9 adult volunteers, 45 young Volunteers (12- 18 years) and 6 volunteers with additional needs, some of whom were adults.

CHIPS continues to have a regular supply of new volunteers, mainly through word of mouth/ friends already volunteering. Some volunteers have seen adverts on school noticeboards. Many youngsters come to CHIPS to complete the service section of the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Fortunately, many continue to volunteer after they have completed the award period.

Our Volunteer Co-ordinator, Karen Lavers, periodically visits the playschemes to meet the volunteers and check all is ok. As, usual the work of the volunteers was recognised at our AGM.

Karen, with the help of some of the Playleaders has re-written the Volunteer Accreditation Scheme. It now includes a probation period, to cover basic skills and knowledge. It is hoped that this will help the volunteers to settle in easily and not to feel overwhelmed. Karen works with the playleaders to encourage them to carry out the Accreditation Scheme with those volunteers who are interested.

**Development Officer:**

Helen Smith continues in this post, working ten hours per week. She continues her superb and vital work raising money from a variety of sources in an increasingly challenging fundraising environment. One of her great successes this year was when CHIPS was awarded a three-year grant from BBC Children in Need, one of the first grants under the revised funding scheme. This will help us fund the extra sessions offered to SEN children.

CHIPS is grateful for further funding from the Childwick Trust and a grant from The Wooden Spoon Charity to fund a new shed at the Bishops’ Stortford Playscheme. The local County Councillors have once again been very generous in supporting CHIPS through their Locality Budgets.

In January CHIPS took part in a Christmas Tree Recycling scheme in conjunction with Just Helping which raised £3,000.

**Fundraising:**

In January the Trustees appointed Hazel Smith as Fundraising Co-ordinator. Hazel works for a few hours per week arranging events. In addition to the usual quizzes, cake sales and Souper Walk, this July Hazel organised a very successful afternoon tea. In October CHIPS will be holding our first Ball for many years. Hazel has many ideas for future activities.

**Finances:**

Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) currently provides our core funding, through the Short Breaks Local Offer, with additional income from grants, donations and fundraising events. Income from donations grew this year although it continues to remain low.

CHIPS is currently involved in the re-tendering process with HCC and understands that there will be some changes to the fees which parents are charged per session. We wait to see the outcome of this process. Our guiding philosophy will remain that no child should be denied access to CHIPS activities due to cost.

CHIPS needs to raise £120,000 each year to cover the activities which are not supported by HCC: children under 5, siblings without special needs, fun activities at schemes, outings, new equipment and the cost of managing our volunteers.

The Charity’s accounts for the financial year 22/23 show a deficit of £17,355. This was a planned overspend, used to increase staff wages, to boost recruitment, aid retention and to support staff through the cost-of-living crisis. Following this increase, the number of staff applications has now risen. It is the Trustees’ ambition; that, as funding allows, we will work towards paying staff at least the Real Living Wage set each year by the Real Living Wage Foundation.

We are proud to state that it has always been CHIPS’s policy to pay all staff over the age of 18 at least the National Living Wage rate and not wait until they reach the age of 23.

**Looking to the Future:**

* Reducing waiting lists: As additional staffing allows, new children will be invited to attend sessions, with the hope that the waiting lists may reduce.
* Appointing more staff: The continuing appointment of new staff remains a priority.
* Additional income for holiday playschemes in Waltham Cross: The Trustees will seek additional income to fund holiday sessions for the children at the Waltham Cross Playscheme, through the contract with HCC or grant applications to other charities and trust funds.

August 2024 will see the Charity enter its 30th year of operation. Thanks to the dedication of our staff, volunteers and Trustees, CHIPS is in a really strong position; ready to continue to serve the children and their families for another 30 years.

A drawing of a face

Description automatically generated

**Graham Nickson**

A lovely drawing of me from a member of Hertford CHIPS

**Chair, CHIPS Trustees**