

Talk for the Parish Meeting re The Ark

16 April 2014

What does the word ARK mean to you? Noah's Ark? Schindler's Ark? Represents a place of safety

For some of the parents – not just a place of safety but also of sanity!

The Ark is a themed and structured Toddler Group held at the Baptist Church each Tuesday during term time. It's for families with children under the age of three and we meet during term time from 9.15am till 11.45am

It was originally just in the hall but it has now extended into the church itself as there are so many families coming. During the year we've had between 15-26 families per session with up to 40 children, although it's mostly 25 – 30. As well as mums, there are dads, grandparents and child-minders who come, too

The Ark has been going about 5 years in its present form and was started by Sue Greene, when she saw there was a need for such a group in the village. It's run by Sue, Maureen Haigh and myself

Sue also works at the Haddenham Preschool and says it's great to see how easily the children transfer into that environment having had the first taste of education and routines with us at Ark.

During the year our themes have been:

Shapes, Farms, Seaside, Royalty [the children each made a crib for Prince George from paper plates, folded in half and decorated] Harvest, Autumn, Pets, Christmas, Polar Lands, Springtime and Easter.

Part of the session is doing craft.....

Here's a bird with real feathers making a nest with real twigs

And I've got a sweet little Easter chick here just coming out of his egg..... I have to keep it in a plastic sleeve because the egg shell is made of porridge oats!

We do have quite a job clearing up after each session, especially when there's glue and glitter involved or, in this case, oats. But we're usually cleared up by 1.30pm with help from husbands and Pastor Jim Mullin

In the Winter, when the theme was Polar lands, we had a large deep tray of 'snow' which was actually corn flour. Now corn flour is very silky to the touch – lovely for sensory play – but some enterprising child thought it would be good to add water from the Arctic Ocean which was on the other side of the room. The result was very gooey and you can still see traces of the stuff on the carpet tiles!

The parents are supposed to keep an eye on their own children but children are SO quick, and the parents really enjoy chatting together!

The next week the 'snow' was made of a different material – it's not just the children who are learning!

Here's an igloo they made..... and a polar bear.....

As well as craft, there is plenty of opportunity for free play, with ride-on toys, a kitchen corner, jigsaws, books, and dressing up clothes. Some little girls like using the construction toys and lots of the boys enjoy pushing the dolls in their little prams!

There is music, songs and a story at the end of each session and these also tie in with the theme.

"A chubby little snowman had a carrot nose,
along came a rabbit and what do you suppose...
that hungry little rabbit, looking for his lunch
ate the snowman's carrot nose
nibble, nibble CRUNCH!"

Halfway through each session, the children have snack time, which sometimes also follows the theme – they actually had pancakes a few weeks ago – but usually consists of various kinds of fruit, cheese and crackers with a drink. After this, there is filter coffee or tea for the parents with home-made cakes.