

March 2018

Open letter to the village of Banwell

Dear lovely people of Banwell

I am writing to you all to talk about Banwell Buddies. As you know, we are the village preschool, and our building is behind the school. We take children from 2 years to school age, and there has been a preschool in Banwell since any of us can remember!

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank anyone who has been involved with us in the past; volunteers, committee members, fundraisers, staff, and supportive parents. Without you, we could not have stayed open. We are proud of our record of continuing to support the families of the village and beyond, and nurturing the children who live in our community. Our aim is to continue to do this for a long time into the future!

A special mention must go to Vikki Fitzpatrick and her family. She has been involved in the preschool for over 18 years. Her dedication is almost too difficult to comprehend. She worked full time completely voluntarily for many years, making huge sacrifices because she is passionate about early years and our community. Her family have given up many weekends working on the building and dealing with emergencies. I'll never forget the weekend that the decking needed completely ripping out and redoing, and Chris, Jaz and all the family pitched in to get the job done, working long hours and managing to do the whole thing in one weekend, enabling the children to be able to play outside again on the Monday morning. Any of us who have had children come to Banwell Buddies owe a huge debt of gratitude to Vikki and her family as without her I have no doubt that the preschool could not have survived.

Emotional thank yous aside, we also need to talk about funding. We support families who are allocated 2 year old funding, the 15 hours for all 3-4 year olds, and the extended funding of 30 hours for working families. We are paid to have these children, but that funding only covers 60% of the amount that it costs us to have that child in our setting on that day. We then need to fundraise to find extra money to cover maintenance of the building, new toys and resources and any extra money that isn't covered by the funding.

There is increasing pressure though. You may be aware that several local committee-led preschools have closed, and we do face increasing difficulty to find volunteers to be on our committee. (It is why I am so thankful to Vikki because we could not have found enough people to replace all the work she has done single-handedly!) We are certain that there is a more efficient way of running Buddies without the need for volunteers and we are working on our long term plans in order for our future to be a sustainable one.

I don't want to imagine a community without a preschool setting. A lot of families would be unable to walk their children to preschool, or drop their younger children at Buddies after dropping older siblings

at the primary school. Children wouldn't have a lovely place to play and learn in the village, and make friends before they go to school. Parents would have to drive their under 5's out of the village to a different setting, and parents who don't drive may not be able to work without childcare. With the proposed closure of the Children's Centre in Banwell we are more keenly aware than ever before of the importance of us staying open. Support for parents of under 5's is so important. Children need local places to socialize and develop, and their parents need support and a trusted place to leave their children while they 'adult'!

So why am I writing to you all? Well firstly to thank everyone for their support in the past, and partly to make everyone aware of the pressures that we currently face. But we also want to ask our local community if there is anyone who thinks they may be able to help us? If so, then we're reaching out to you now! Maintenance of the building is always a costly issue, as is upkeep of the garden. We always welcome people from the community to be on our committee, so if you'd like to join us please just shout. Or maybe there's someone out there who can advise us on how we can move on from being a committee-led preschool? We would welcome some expert advice!

I always think of Banwell Buddies as like the house in the film 'Up'. I don't know if you've seen it, but the house even looks like our building! The house floats up into the air and goes travelling, and I think of each person who supports us as one of the balloons that keeps it afloat. Without enough balloons we wouldn't have been able to keep us moving forward, or even up. It's always been a team effort and we'd like to welcome anyone to our team who has enough puff for just one balloon!