 Report March 2021-April 2022

Smarties is the church stay-and-play toddler group which meets every Thursday in term time from 10.15 till 11.45 in room four. Anyone who cares for children age 0-4 is welcome with their children. We play, drink tea, eat snacks, chat, laugh, sing, rhyme and enjoy being together.

Smarties is all about people. It is about Jesus’ love for people.  Our vision at Smarties is to encourage and support young families and share God’s love with them.

Praise God - Smarties is back! We have returned after a period of online Facebook meets where we chatted, read Bible stories and sang during times of Covid restrictions.

Thank you, God, for your help and provision as we navigated all the different Covid restrictions and rules to keep people safe and be able to meet! Thank you to my wonderful and devoted Smarties team who have prayed with me and showed great patience and served as I have interpreted and changed the ways of working to comply with the various Covid rules at different times. Thanks to Lucy for her inspiration and patience as we navigated ways forward online, and for Sam Williams as she inspired and equipped me to meet in person. We’re thankful as well for having a former Smarties parent who works for Tewkesbury’s environmental health department and continually guided and evaluated my new ways of working.

We have also been grateful to Care For The Family,  Playtime, The National Youth Agency, the Church of England, and those tirelessly working to roll out the successful vaccine program, all of whom have informed and guided us through this tricky time. Thanks also to many of you in the church and the team of intercessors who have prayed us back into room four, having been absent for over a year.

One thing we have all learnt about over the last two years is the importance of relationship and community. At Smarties we love to meet young families, toddlers, parents, grandparents and share life with them wherever they are at.

Some families have returned delighted about meeting, and others anxious, with children who are not used to being with other children. However, that anxiety is slowly dissipating and the joy of meeting with others is now so much more evident, and people are coming back in increasing numbers.

One thing is for sure, many  families who come to us are experiencing and will experience increasing pressures.  Pray for us as we try and support and pray for them and involve other agencies. Indeed, this last year has led to visits to the Food Bank, calls to Christians Against Poverty and liaising with various government and community groups.  Poverty, depression and children with specific learning difficulties are some of the issues our families have highlighted to us.

It has been great for us at Smarties to welcome new families to the church with babies and toddlers and for them to come along to Smarties and help them feel like they belong and get to know other families in the area. They have done so with great enthusiasm.

I’m so grateful to all our church parents who help make Smarties the group it is and often serve while their child plays, indeed the children and parents often end up staying to tidy up.

Thank you again so much to my lovely Smarties team, some of whom often drop everything at short notice to come, even when they are not on duty! They are Lucy, Andy, Isla, Emma, Andrea and Joy.

**Please pray for …**

* The mums, dads, grandparents and carers who bring their children to Smarties.   
  Pray for those in increasing financial need and those whose families have a great number of other needs. Pray we at Smarties know when to, and how to, help. Pray for building of community and relationship. For wisdom to know what practical help to offer. For wisdom to know how to share God’s love in sometimes difficult conversations and situations. Indeed, we want these families to find Jesus.
* My Smarties team.   
  Continuing and increasing wisdom, vision and enthusiasm. For renewed vision, passion and energy for this mission and for God’s spirit to continue to enable and equip the team and add to its number.
* For those at Trinity with young families as they take part in Smarties.
* The use of our Smarties Facebook page to reach more families in the Tewkesbury area throughout the week.
* Continuing and fresh inspiration to share bible stories and bible crafts, as well as sharing about Jesus during the traditional Christian festivals.
* Enjoyment of the outdoors this summer as we use the outdoor space to splash, grow, play and for the joy and opportunities that brings.

One final thought as I close; Jesus spoke in Luke 4 of the spirit of the Lord being upon him to proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. I would love for us to make many of these proclamations at Smarties in Jesus name.

Anyone interested in knowing more about Smarties please don’t hesitate to get in touch. We are always looking for volunteers to add to our team My details are in the church directory or you can contact me via email at Smarties@trinitytewkesbury.org.uk

Thanks for reading and praying,

Rachael Elliott