

'Jellie Tots'

The story of a new Toddler Group at Lawrence Weston Baptist Church

In 2005 Westbury on Trym Baptist Church, after prayerfully considering planting a church somewhere locally decided instead to release me, their Associate Minister for a day and a half each week to explore the possibility of God doing new things at this little church on a large urban council housing estate just five miles away. The congregation of LWBC at that time consisted of a loyal, prayerful group of eight (pre-dominantly elderly) women and one man - and they had asked for help. **Our story is one of God's leading and his opening up the way.**



We immediately began producing a regular prayer letter that was sent to the member churches of our local Baptist 'cluster'. Some folk within those churches promised to pray faithfully for the kingdom work on the estate.

Our first task was to make contact with local agencies on the estate and establish from consultation with them, what activities would best serve the community.

This involved conversation with local health workers, local schools, and the other churches on the estate.

There are some good local groups for Toddlers but the only Christian one closed down recently due to the leader's health problems. No other groups operate on a Friday.

Only when we had established that there was a need for a toddler group did we began making plans.

First and foremost we needed a team and our little congregation was not able to meet this need. However, God had been preparing the way for us:

- Mary Clarke, the first volunteer in the newly formed re:Source had chosen to work with us at LWBC and she was keen to be involved in the project.
- Five other women & one man from Cairns Road and Horfield Baptist Churches felt called by God to join us and we had our team!

We appointed a chairperson, a minute taker and a treasurer and then discussed what our toddler group might look like and prepared a task list:

- **Toys** – some we bought new, many were donated by cluster church members, some we found in charity shops
- **Other equipment** - new mugs and child cups for refreshments and potties and changing mats.
- **Activities:** crafts and other activities like singing and story telling

- **Healthy Eating provision** - inspired by the 'Healthy Eating Project' on the estate. Food preparation is clean and safe in our newly refurbished kitchen. The kitchen was inspected by the local authority.

A member of our team has an up to date food hygiene certificate and she took responsibility for food preparation.

We decided to provide tea/coffee for adults and squash for the children with a healthy snack choice of a variety of fruits, (no biscuits!) and the opportunity to make up a healthy packed lunch for the children.



- **Finance:** We prepared a budget/ asked for donations from Baptist cluster churches/opened a bank account/ researched amongst young mums on the estate re: reasonable contribution to costs.
Decision: £1 per session.
The kitchen had recently been refurbished thanks to a Baptist Union grant of £3000 from 'Against the Stream'.
We wrote to member churches in our local Baptist Cluster asking for financial assistance and received gifts of £400.
- **Health & Safety.** First aid - some team members had a first aid qualification. Provision for cleaning of toilets before and after sessions - as many others use the church premises.
Decision re: a safe number of parents and toddlers that we can provide for.
- **Child Protection** The church policy had to be adapted for Jellie Tots – including CRB checks for all team members and procedure for appointing team members.
- **Advertising** – we chose a name *Jellie Tots* and designed our own logo. We distributed leaflets to local flats where many single mums live and put up posters outside the church and at the local Health Centre etc.
- **Storage** – adequate storage was found after some 'clearing out' at the church. The new toddler store was re-painted on a 'Cluster' work-day.

We were soon able to agree a timescale to opening day:

from 1st planning meeting to opening day took 8 months

Successes:

- As a direct result of **Jellie Tots** four young families now attend Sunday services regularly and are taking an active part in our community life.
- Trusting relationships have gradually developed between team members and carers and they are beginning to confide in us.
- Cluster churches are beginning to understand that work in our urban churches – often in difficult

Socio-economic situations – needs long-term support prayerfully, financially and in practical ways.

The benefits of this sharing in local 'front-line mission' are immediate.

- We really appreciate the value of prayer. We pray together as a team before each session and at planning meetings and Jellie Tots is always on our Church Prayer Letter.

