

# Get Involved!



Getting involved in the committee of your child's playgroup can seem a bit daunting – how much time will you be expected to give, what if you make the wrong decision and what are you going to get out of it are common questions. Two parents who did decide to get involved were Tim Lofthouse and Olive Burns, they spoke to Jacqui Frazer from Early Years Community Development team to explain why they took the plunge.

Jack Horner Community Playgroup and Mother Goose Community Playgroup operate from the same premises in Sheskburn Recreation Centre in Ballycastle. Mother Goose is registered for 25 children in their pre-school year and, has no PEAG places, Jack Horner is registered for 25 children and has 12 PEAG places. One committee manages both groups.

Tim Lofthouse joined the committee about five years ago when his children were attending the playgroups. As someone who had worked in a bank, he was the obvious choice for Treasurer! When the children moved on, he was asked to stay on as Hon. Treasurer for a small fee. This means that he now organises the group's wages and banking and produces reports for committee meetings but does not have a vote on the committee.

He finds the work enjoyable and not overly time-consuming. Tim was new to Ballycastle and found that being on the playgroup committee helped him to get involved in the local community. As Tim puts it, "It helped me to meet other parents in the area and form friendships".

As with most people involved in a voluntary or community based organisation, Tim's association with both playgroups is not confined to the role of Treasurer. In February he and Bernie, the Chairperson, took part in a sponsored swim along with two other athletic and energetic "volunteers" to raise some hundreds of pounds for group funds.

Tober Tinys Community Playgroup is based in the village of Tobermore. The group opened in the year 2000, is registered for 25 children and is part of the Pre-school Expansion Programme.

Olive joined the committee as Assistant Treasurer at the AGM in 2003. She was keen to become involved in the committee as she knew that her daughter, Megan, would be attending the group. Olive acknowledges that being a committee member is hard work which takes time and effort. However, she enjoys the work and sees it as her way of giving something back to the playgroup for the benefit of all the children.

At the next AGM she expects some of the committee will stay on for another year even though their children may have left the group and gives two reasons for this, "Firstly, the valuable experience gained while serving on the committee brings stability and knowledge to the group and we don't want to lose that. Secondly, the playgroup is seen as being part of the whole community, not an isolated organisation".

If your child is about to start playgroup, or has been attending for a while and you're not sure about getting involved in the Committee, give it a go. Your input, whether it is giving advice or helping organise meetings will be welcome. As Olive says, "This is not something that I could walk away from. In years to come you can look back and say I'm glad I did that, I played my part".