

## Vale of Stour – Children’s and Families Work – Summer Update

### A short reflection on the summer 2023

The summer is always a busy time for family work – with children off school and families at home our provision and enabling of mission work is vital for our communities. It is a time to look beyond the walls of our churches, tread boldly into our communities, spark conversation and share in Jesus’ love with our neighbour. I have witnessed so much mission work this summer, inviting our neighbours to connect with God and our church families. **We started the summer by taking Church to the park** – our family teddy bears picnic was held in Mary Stevens Park and gave opportunity to explore God in our everyday. **We have connected with our communities through holiday clubs, family activity mornings, online prayers at the Parent/Carer Summer Sanctuary and social media updates.** Our mission work across the circuit has helped us to reach in excess of 250 children and their families.

I am trying hard ***not*** to measure our ‘success’ on numbers – the love of God is to be shared amongst everyone and if we impact just a small percentage of those who have visited us then there is our success right there. It is important to recognize and thank those who have been involved at the centre and the edges of all the activity we have provided. From those who help to set-up and pack down, those who provide creative ideas, those who lead and welcome, those who are in the kitchen (often the first to arrive and last to leave) those who have found a confidence to help for the first time and those who have stepped up once again, those who have engaged with children and their families by listening or conversing, those who have buttered a child’s slice of toast, those who have tied a shoelace and those who mastered the technology to support. Everyone plays such an important role in making these things happen. I am also expressing great thanks to those who have prayed over these events, those who maybe cannot take an active role but can help in other ways and those who have been unable to offer anything this summer but will be doing so in the future.

Our mission work is vital to the life of our churches. It is absolutely heart-warming to see intergenerational worship happening at these events, The young learning from the older generation and vice versa. I was reminded in a service this week by Rev. Margaret Eales, **we all have a part to play in the vision of our future** and whilst those visions may vary in how things will look, essentially our community and neighbour should be at the heart of what we do in mission.

A stand out comment for me, from our Shine Church gathering was from a parent who has been bringing her son to regular church gatherings for those with additional needs: “Jacob has come on so much since accessing these sessions. From sitting by the front door waiting to leave the whole time, to now participating in church, food with friends and also the activities! “

Church is so much more than our Sunday services and fellowship that we have between us – we are a sanctuary of acceptance and love and I know that is everything Jesus would have wanted us to be.

Thanks again to everyone who has helped over the summer to welcome our community, to greet our neighbours and to share the love of Jesus with all those families who have graced us with their presence.

**Blessings Claire**