

Reaching families through pioneering children's work

offered them the chance to be in community," he said. "We have three groups – two meeting at my house and one in Aspire Ryde. We call them 'Dwell' as that seemed an appropriate name for what we do.

"Those who meet at Aspire Ryde meet for Bible study and to think about growing deeper in their discipleship. Those who meet at my house typically have dinner together on a Tuesday evening. I'll cook, and people will bring desserts and talk about what's happened in the last week. Putting the kettle on afterwards is the signal for us to look at Scripture, watch something online or pray for each other. The original group has now got too large, which is why we're splitting it into two.

"We want to develop these groups, to provide some oversight and to connect all three groups together for worship and prayer. They are already linked to Harbour Church on the mainland, and are aiming to deepen people's discipleship and accountability to each other."

The Rev David Brown, associate minister at Warfield Church in Bracknell, was part of the group with his wife Anne, until 2019. He said: "At a time in our lives when we were adjusting to living in new area, exploring new areas of ministry, and then unexpectedly facing a couple of major family health crises, being part of Dwell was a lifeline for us.

"We quickly built deep friendships, were able to share openly and honestly about anything and everything we wanted to, and were supported by a weekly opportunity to eat together, worship together, pray together and generally just share life together."

These new forms of pioneer



Jake Fookes, aged two, enjoys playing at the Butterflies toddler group inside the Church of the Blessed Mary, Upham

IN the rural village of Upham, pioneering has meant engaging with families by creating a parent and toddler group, and an after-school group for children.

The parish's families worker Kate Smyth launched Butterflies, a weekly group for parents, babies and toddlers about a year ago.

They meet every Thursday morning in the Church of the Blessed Mary to play with a variety of toys, eat snacks, sing songs, say simple prayers and listen to Bible stories. Parents are given a cuppa and a listening ear.

And as those relationships build up, some of the parents may get invited to other events, as they create community together.

"Part of the reason for asking me to use my pioneering gifts was a recognition that without new generations being involved, the church might just die," she said. "Starting a new

toddler group from scratch in the middle of a pandemic was hard work, but we reached people by going into schools and handing out leaflets, using social media and by word of mouth.

"We removed some pews inside the church to make it easier to meet and have kept faithful to God, talking to whoever he brings in.

"There was also a need for an after-school club, so we started Champions, which meets on a Thursday straight from school.

"Then we have invited some parents to a parenting course at St Peter's, Bishop's Waltham, to Alpha courses, and to the all-age services at Upham. It's all about building relationships."

Charlotte Wirdham, who brings one-year-old Hugo, said: "It's good to go to a different environment and for Hugo to mix and play with other children.

"I also like it as my mother-in-law helps here,



Above: Hugo Wirdham at the Butterflies toddler group; right: the Champions after-school group meet in church

and it's good to meet others."

And Kate Fookes, who brings two-year-old Jake to the group, said: "It's great to have a change of scene and for Jake to play with other toys. I think it's good to have this inside a church."

For full details, see: www.stpetersbw.org.uk



ministry are following on from our initial Pioneer Ministry Project, which was funded by some central Church grants from 2016-21.

Earlier this year, the Church Army completed a report evaluating that project, which looked at pioneer ministry in Leesland Neighbourhood Church, St Margaret's Southsea, St Luke's Southsea, the PO9 area of Havant, and Choir Church Portsmouth, as case studies.

That Pioneer Project also included the creation of Harbour Church, a church plant from St Peter's, Brighton, aimed at students and young people in Portsmouth city centre, which now welcomes more than 700 across four venues, with an average age of 27.

The Church Army report concluded there were areas of success to celebrate, but also specific challenges that had arisen. For details, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/pioneer.



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