



Caring for animals in church allotment

THIS church in Gosport now cares for chickens and tortoises!

The animals were unveiled to excited children at a launch event for the 'Muddy Church' allotment space outside St Matthew's, Bridgemaury. The animals are kept in a fenced-off area, where the church also grows flowers and vegetables in multiple beds. The area is for the whole community to use - to find out more about God's precious gift of nature, and to learn how to care for plants and animals.

For the launch day, the church invited children from Badger Pre-School, as well as children from the Little Wilds outdoor stay and play. They loved stroking the chickens and tortoises, planting seeds and watering the plants.

Both groups will use the area in future. The Little Wilds group hire part of the church's grounds to offer outdoor play for around 15 pre-school children every week, including a mud kitchen, water play, painting, a sandpit and other outdoor activities parents may not be able to do at home. The allotment area will also help the church's interaction with the Badger pre-school, based at the nearby

Holbrook Primary School.

Traditional team vicar the Rev Samantha Martell said: "We wanted to have some animals to help us with that interaction with families and children's groups. Of course, we'll be using that area for our regular 'Muddy Church' sessions, which happen once a month on Saturday mornings. We welcome children to learn how to tend an allotment space, and teach them about God's care for us.

"Our community café - St Matts on the Corner - is open every morning, Monday to Saturday, from 8:45am to 1:30pm, serving hot drinks, snacks and lunches. The vegetables we grow and the eggs laid by the chickens will be used in this café - and in the free meals we offer to families in need each week.

"We'd like to offer the chance for young people to gain experience in catering and customer service. There aren't many Saturday jobs in this area, so we'd love to give them a chance to work in our café.

"And we also welcome a weekly group for those aged 16-25 who have special needs, called Shining Stars."



Top: the Rev Samantha Martell with Tommy Mackenzie, 2, and one of the chickens; above: watering the plants in the allotment

The new allotment area, which includes homes for both chickens and tortoises and multiple flower beds, is enclosed using fencing provided by Gosport Borough Council. That's why the Mayor of Gosport, Cllr Martin Pepper, was asked to formally open the space - by cutting a ribbon.

And for the launch day, children, parents and carers were able to eat allotment-themed cake made by cafe volunteer Ali Ryan, who also runs Ali's Bakery.