

Connors Toy Libraries

**2024-2025**

# **Annual Report**

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**Charity No -  
1129353**

**Company No -  
06872236**



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# Connors Toy Libraries



Legal and Administrative Information  
For the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

Charity Name - Connors Toy Libraries

Registered Charity Number - 1129353

Company Number - 06872239

## Executive Committee:

The policy and general management of the affairs of the charity are directed by an elective Executive Committee. The committee is elected from our Trustees/Directors who are representatives of each of our Toy Library groups. The committee consists of our Honorary Officers and Trustees and is not less than five or more than twenty. The staff facilitate meetings.

Principal Address:  
Grenville House,  
St Georges Square,  
Portsea,  
Portsmouth,  
PO1 3AZ

Bankers:  
The Natwest Bank,  
130 Commercial Road,  
Portsmouth,  
Hants,  
PO1 1ES

Auditor:  
Janet Stow  
in a voluntary capacity  
C/o Retail Efficiency Ltd

# Trustees' Annual Report

## 2024-25



Trustees continue to meet every month to oversee the running of the Toy Library service and look at how to secure its future moving forward.

As a charity we are running on our reserve funding and this is in place till March 2026 whilst we continue to apply for funding to continue the service.

We received funding from The Hive ,Albert Hunt, Wave 105, Leather Sellers, Garfield and Weston, Bauer Radio, HIWCF, Percy Bilton, The Wakeham Trust, The Partnership Foundation, Warburtons, The Stafford Trust, Tesco Blue Tokens, Electrical Safety First, Lottery Awards for All, Toy Trust. We applied for and received 6091.46 gift aid raised from donations and events.

This year we have supported 1853 adults and 3744 children across the service through Toy Store, Mobile Toy Library, Toy Library Community Groups & Outreach support. 1727 individuals accessing the service have borrowed toys and resources to continue to play at home.

We continue to receive referrals for hard to reach and vulnerable families with 91 families supported this year. 3596 individuals have attended our community toy library groups and 178 families and organisations joined our Toy Store as a member.

### Objective and Activities

The Connors Toy Libraries were set up to:

A) Assist in the provision of facilities and equipment for the recreational, educational, therapeutic and leisure time occupation of:

1. Children
2. Children and adult carers of persons who are disabled, long term sick or elderly.
3. Disabled. long term sick and elderly persons in receipt of care.

B)

1. In the interests of social welfare with object of improving their conditions of life.
2. To promote better care and upbringing of children.

Signed on behalf of trustees on.....

Please print name of signatory.....



# Trustee / Directors

Coralee Graham	Chairperson
Jill Lydford	Trustee / Director
Sarah Le May	Honorary (Volunteer) Trustee
Jess O'Rourke	Hon Secretary
Melanie Palmer	Trustee / Director
Danielle Gilkes	Trustee Director
Roberta Coles (Resigned 24/25)	Trustee / Director

This list of trustee was up to date on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

# About Charity

## Community - Connection - Play.

Supporting Portsmouth families through meaningful moments and lasting impact.

Connors Toy Libraries has been a trusted part of the community for over five decades, proudly celebrating 52 years of service this year. Since our founding, we have been dedicated to supporting families and helping children thrive through play.

We offer a welcoming and inclusive environment where families can access a wide range of quality toys, resources and support. Our work extends across three main areas:

- **Outreach Support** for families who need extra help & support.
- **Community Toy Library Groups** that bring families together.
- **Toy Store** where members can join and borrow toys that inspire creativity, learning and joy.
- **Mobile Toy Library** brings play directly to families wherever they are, including refuges, hostels, hotels and temporary accommodation.

At Connors Toy Libraries, we believe that every child deserves the chance to play, explore and grow, regardless of background or circumstances.

Through the support of our community, partners and dedicated team, we continue to make that vision a reality year after year.



# Annual Report 2024-25



This report provides an overview of Connors Toy Libraries work during the period from April 2024 to March 2025, including our challenges, highlights, and key achievements.

As we reached the end of March 2025, we completed our first full year operating without funding from The Big Lottery. We were fortunate to secure support from alternative funding sources and generate income through the services we offer. However, this income alone is not sufficient to ensure our long-term sustainability without additional financial support. We are now entering a second year operating on reserve funds while continuing to actively seek new funding opportunities. Without further financial support secured by March 2026, Connors Toy Library will be at risk of closure.

## **Service Impact**

Between April 2024 and March 2025, the Toy Library was accessed by:

1,853 adults

3,744 children

These services were accessed through:

Community Toy Library Groups

Mobile Toy Library

Outreach Support

Toy Store

79% of participants attending our groups borrowed toys and resources.

## **Project Focus and Outcomes**

Our project aims to deliver a broad range of support for families and the wider community, including:

Promoting community cohesion

Reducing isolation and depression

Helping families establish routines

Alleviating poverty and deprivation through early intervention

Supporting mental health and emotional wellbeing

Supporting adult and children who are disabled or have long term illness.

Strengthening parent-child relationships

Assisting families in accessing childcare

Facilitating supervised contact to bring families together

Empowering families during meetings and service engagement

Keeping children safe through informed recommendations

Making toys affordable and accessible for all families

Creating inclusive play opportunities for children with SEND

Supporting families with English as an additional language to integrate into the community

Providing a safe space for parents to talk, build relationships, and access peer support



# Meet Our Team

At the heart of Connors Toy Library is a small, passionate team committed to supporting families and enriching childhood through the power of play. Our staff bring a wealth of experience, compassion and we are dedicated to every aspect of our work. From community outreach to toy loan to running inclusive, welcoming play sessions for all.

Together, our team is united by shared belief - that every child deserves access to community, connection & play. Through thoughtful, responsive support we make a lasting difference in the lives of the families we serve.



**ABBY**

MANAGER



**CHRIS**

ADMINISTRATOR



**CATHERINE**

GROUP SUPPORT WORKER



**LISA**

TOY STORE LEAD



**SOPHIE**

GROUP SUPPORT WORKER



**SADIE**

OUTREACH WORKER



**STACEY**

OUTREACH WORKER



# Vision And Mission

## Vision

A community where every child, regardless of background has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive through play. We envision a world where families are connected, supported and empowered by shared resources and where play is recognised as a vital part of early childhood and community wellbeing.

## Mission

Connors's Toy Library exists to make play accessible and meaningful for all children. We offer affordable toy borrowing, inclusive community groups and outreach support for vulnerable and hard to reach families through trusted referral pathways. By promoting the sharing of resources, we champion sustainability, community connection and early childhood development.

# Community Toy Library Groups

## Report 24-25

We operated 11 weekly Toy Library Groups across our 10 venues. One of these is a dedicated SEND session, designed for children with additional needs whether diagnosed or not. Some children benefit from a calmer, more structured environment and this session is tailored to meet those needs. We offer a range of sensory, therapeutic and tactile toys and resources and families attending this session do so in a welcoming space, free from the judgement they may have experienced elsewhere.

Across all sessions, children are given the opportunity to play with a wide variety of toys, which are rotated weekly to maintain interest and encourage development. Each session also includes a weekly craft activity, themed to reflect cultural events, seasonal changes or learning opportunities this encourages creativity and engagement for children of all backgrounds.

79% of attendees borrow toys and/or resources to take home, extending the benefits of the Toy Library beyond the sessions themselves.

### **Feedback from services users -**

"The Toy Library has been a lifeline for me and my little one. It's somewhere we both feel welcome and supported every week."

"I love that we can just turn up without needing to book it takes the pressure off and makes it so much easier for me and the kids."

"The SEND session has been amazing for my son. It's calm, inclusive and the staff really understand his needs."

"The variety of toys is brilliant! My children are always excited to come and borrowing toys has saved us a lot of money and meltdowns when group is finished"

"The weekly craft activities are great. My daughter loves them and it gets her creating things that we wouldn't have at home"

"It's more than just a playgroup. It's a space where I've made friends felt heard and felt part of something."

"The Toy Library helped me gain confidence as a new parent. I didn't know anyone locally but now I look forward to going every week."

# Mobile Toy Library

## Report 24-25

Our Mobile Toy Library continues to be a valuable outreach tool, allowing us to attend events across the city organised by local businesses, charities, schools and community groups. From family fun days to school fetes, we bring a wide range of toys to create play opportunities for families, while also promoting the wider services offered by Connors Toy Library.

In addition to public events, we also respond to identified areas of need within the community, delivering play sessions and support in locations such as hostels, temporary accommodation, refuges, and hotels.

This flexible approach ensures that children in challenging circumstances still have access to safe and engaging play.

We were proud to attend Victorious, the city's largest annual festival for the second consecutive year. At the event, we provided toys and resources for families, along with a designated safe space for infant feeding and baby changing. We've been invited to return again in 2025, reflecting the positive impact of our presence.

We also participated in a local SEND offer event, showcasing our inclusive services to families and professionals who can benefit from what we provide.





# Toy Store

## Report 24-25

Our dedicated Toy Store established on 1st May 2002 continues to be a vital and growing part of Connors Toy Library. We are incredibly proud of the store's impact and the flexibility it offers to families and professionals across the community.

This year our Toy Store has grown to 178 active members, including 107 returning members and 71 new members.

Membership is open to:

Families (including those with children with additional needs)

Foster carers

Childminders and Nurseries

Schools

Uniformed groups

Early years professionals

Weekly playgroups

Portage services

Other local charities

Breakfast and after-school clubs

Playschemes

Memberships start from as little as £20 per year, with larger group memberships (e.g., playschemes) available for up to £150 annually.

Members can borrow toys for up to six weeks at a time, with flexibility to extend if needed. We maintain a waiting list for popular items and work proactively to secure funding for high demand or specialist toys as needed.

Over the past year, 1,010 children have benefited from Toy Store resources, 378 of whom are identified as having additional needs. These families often rely on the Toy Store to access specialist items such as weighted blankets, sensory lights and dark dens. Items that are often financially out of reach.

We continue to seek and secure funding to replace damaged items and purchase new, in demand toys, ensuring the store remains responsive and inclusive.

Our online platform allows families to browse our full toy catalogue, sign up for membership, and reserve items, all without needing to visit in person. This is especially valuable for families facing mobility issues, transportation challenges, or other barriers. For those families that can physically come into Toy Store we are open throughout the week and they can come and browse and borrow with no need to book prior.

We also offer a delivery and collection service for a small fee of £4, allowing access to large or specialist items that families may not be able to transport themselves.



# Outreach Support Report 24-25

The outreach project continues to provide vital support to families who may be vulnerable or difficult to reach. Alongside this, we also receive a wide range of referrals for families in need of support for various reasons, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), low income, mental health challenges and parent-child relationship difficulties.

There are no eligibility criteria for our referrals, our support is open to all. We receive referrals from a variety of professionals and agencies working closely with families, such as Health Visitors, The Family Nurse Partnership, Portage, Children' Social Care, Homestart, Early Help teams, schools, nurseries and childminders. We also welcome self-referrals and our own staff and volunteers actively refer families as part of our early intervention efforts.

In 2024–2025, the outreach service supported 91 families comprising 165 adults and 168 children. Some families continued to receive support into the following year. Unlike many other family support services, Connors Toy Library has no time limit on outreach support. Families remain with us for as long as they need and we walk alongside them at every step.

### **Our goals are to:**

- Strengthen community connections
- Build family resilience
- Foster strong parent-child relationships
- Increase confidence and social skills
- Improve early childhood development and access to opportunities
- Support school readiness

This service has a powerful and far-reaching impact on the community. We meet families where they are without judgment or expectation. Together with them, we set achievable, family led goals. This collaborative approach empowers families to take ownership of their progress.

### **We provide support in various ways, including:**

- Home visits
- Community toy library sessions
- Play support and early years advice
- Help with form filling
- Accessing health and wellbeing services
- Advocating for families and attending multi-agency meetings
- Advice on behavior, weaning, and feeding
- Signposting to specialist services for more complex needs
- Supporting family contact when relationships are estranged

## Continued...

We also offer practical support where needed. This includes helping families access local food banks, as well as directly providing essentials such as food, nappies, hygiene products, white goods, and furniture.

Our outreach service is inclusive and diverse. We have supported families from a wide range of backgrounds and life situations, including teen parents and parents with disabilities or additional needs and families seeking asylum.

For many children, our service has offered new opportunities to play, socialize and build friendships. In particular our toy library venues with outdoor spaces have provided children especially those without access to gardens at home a safe and engaging environment to explore and enjoy.



## Case Study - Outreach Family



This family was referred to our outreach service by a health visitor. They had recently moved into the area and were experiencing high levels of isolation. The primary carer was struggling with low mood and anxiety following the birth of a second child. There were financial pressures, no extended support network nearby and concerns around one of the children's lack of social development.

The carer expressed feeling overwhelmed and uncertain about how to support the children's early development. Attending groups alone felt daunting and day-to-day routines were becoming increasingly difficult to manage.

Our first visit focused on building rapport and understanding the family's needs. A soft needs assessment revealed a lack of essential baby items, limited access to early years experiences, and increasing emotional strain.

Over the following months, we provided a range of support tailored to the family's needs:  
**Emotional Support:** Weekly home visits provided a consistent and safe space to talk, reflect, and problem-solve. We discussed emotional wellbeing, daily routines, and ways to manage the primary carer's anxiety.

**Community Engagement:** We supported the family to attend local toy library sessions and stay-and-play groups, initially accompanying them to build confidence. This helped reduce isolation and supported the child's social development.

**Practical Assistance:** We helped secure items including nappies, hygiene products, and baby equipment. The family was also referred to a local food bank and we assisted with applications for financial and energy-related support.

**Early Years and Parenting Support:** We introduced simple home based play and learning strategies. We supported the family through the nursery application process to help prepare for school readiness.

**Health and Wellbeing Access:** We connected the family to local mental health support and parent wellbeing services. With consent, we liaised with other professionals already involved to create a more joined-up approach.

Over time, the primary carer's confidence improved significantly. They began attending community sessions independently and developed new peer relationships. The child who had previously shown signs of delay began to speak more confidently, engage in group activities, and adapt well to a nursery setting.

The family became more resilient, proactive, and better connected to their community. They reported feeling more in control, less isolated and better equipped to meet the children's needs.

# Early Intervention

We continue to provide early intervention to all families who access any of our four core projects. This support often begins in one of two ways, either families approach our staff and volunteers directly for help or more commonly it emerges through the trusting relationships we build over time. By actively listening to conversations and noticing concerns we are able to offer support at the earliest possible stage.

Much of our early intervention happens naturally through peer to peer support. Families connect in our welcoming spaces, share experiences and offer advice to one another. These safe and supportive environments allow meaningful conversations to flourish. Staff and volunteers build on this by offering informed guidance, signposting to relevant services and when appropriate, referring to our outreach support project.

Our early intervention model ensures that families attending community toy library sessions are surrounded by people who notice when something changes or isn't quite right. This allows us to provide timely, informal support often from the very first contact. Many of the families who receive early intervention are not involved with any other services and have no professionals currently supporting them.

The support we offer covers a wide range of areas. For children, we've provided guidance on weaning, feeding, toilet training, eating habits, behavior, social skills, developmental delays, sleep, routines, immunisations and accessing health appointments. However, the support we offer is not always centered on the children as many adults need help for themselves too. We regularly support parents and carers with their own mental health, family difficulties, benefit applications, housing issues, anxiety, postnatal depression and substance misuse.

In some cases, this includes sourcing emergency funding or donations to provide food, gas and electricity top-ups, hygiene essentials, baby items or other urgent needs. Not all families require 1:1 outreach but many still face crisis moments and we are there to help in those times.



# Volunteers



In the year 2024–2025, we had 29 volunteers involved across the service. During that time, several moved on to paid employment. While we always feel the loss of dedicated volunteers, this is exactly the kind of outcome we aim to support. Many of our volunteers have been out of work for several years, often lacking confidence, recent experience or training. Through their time with us they gain valuable skills, build self-esteem and become empowered to take the next step into employment.

In addition to our formal volunteers, we also have a number of parent-helpers who support us during sessions. These individuals may not yet be ready to commit to a full volunteer role but are happy to help with tasks during groups as needed, contributing meaningfully while gaining confidence at their own pace.

We are also supported by six active committee members, all of whom have been part of Connors Toy Library in some capacity, whether as parents attending sessions, members of the toy store, or former volunteers who have helped run community toy library sessions. Their lived experience ensures our leadership remains grounded in the needs of the families we serve.

All volunteers undergo DBS checks and complete core training, including food hygiene, manual handling and safeguarding, delivered online. In addition we provide access to a fully accredited paediatric first aid course valid for three years, sourced through an external agency. This ensures that our volunteers are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to support families safely and effectively.

## Quotes from Volunteers

"I enjoy supporting parents and challenges, being a young mum myself and receiving support its nice to give back."

"Volunteering for me is giving back but also being able to do it with my own child at group. I love being able to chat to parents and grandparents. Being able to see the difference these groups make. It has made me realise I want to do more and eventually seek employment at Connors Toy Library in the future"

"I love coming to group, I have met so many families and I love being a part of the community at group"

"I love volunteering, its given me a huge sense of purpose that I didn't even know I needed! Its super rewarding and it really helps to know your not alone in the hardest job in the world, Parenting!"

I have been a volunteer for 9 years now, when i first came along as i needed support and they helped alot. Now i like to help and support other families who need supports, Its nice to chat to others in the same situation"

# Events

This year in addition to attending events hosted by other providers such as Victorious, Home-Start Family Fest, the Local Offer event, school fetes and open days, we also delivered several of our own community events.

Unfortunately, we were unable to host our annual Toy Library Picnic this year due to circumstances beyond our control. However, we did hold a Teddy Bears' Picnic at one of our regular session venues, which was a great success with 52 people attending.

Our Halloween event welcomed 64 attendees and took place at one of our quieter Toy Library venues. This provided a fantastic opportunity to showcase that space to new families in a fun and welcoming environment.

Our annual Easter party was another highlight, with 74 people attending. Children enjoyed themed activities and received a gift from the Easter Bunny, which made the event extra special for many families.

To round off the year, we held six Christmas parties over two days, attended by a total of 266 people. Every child had the opportunity to visit Santa in the grotto and received a gift, creating magical memories and festive joy for all who came.





# Next Years Plans



As we look to the future, we are excited to share our plans and vision for the year ahead at Connors Toy Library. A key moment of change took place in May 2025 with the introduction of new management, bringing with it fresh energy, ideas and a renewed commitment to the families we serve.

This leadership change marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for Connors. Over the next year, we will be introducing new services, launching group sessions tailored to current needs and strengthening the structure of existing projects to ensure they remain relevant, inclusive and effective.

We also aim to deepen our partnerships with community organisations, and support services.

Historically, Connors Toy Library has delivered its work quietly, enreaching families through word of mouth, trusted relationships and grassroots presence. While this has been a strength, we now recognise the importance of making more noise about what we do. We want to reach more families, engage new communities and make sure that those who need support know exactly where to find it.

We are committed to:

- Raising the profile of our work across Portsmouth and beyond
- Reaching new families, particularly those who are underrepresented or isolated
- Strengthening existing community partnerships and building new ones
- Expanding our offer with new groups, events and outreach activities
- Continuing to provide compassionate early intervention and practical family support

"As the new manager, I am personally committed to making positive, lasting changes that will ensure Connors Toy Library continues to be a trusted and valued part of the Portsmouth community for the next year and for many years to come.

With the support of our dedicated team, volunteers and partners, we will continue to grow, adapt and provide the responsive, family led services that have always been at the heart of Connors. The future is bright, and we're ready to shout about it"

# Contact Us



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