

# NEWSLETTER

Term One and Two 2016



Happy New Year!

Whoa! Is it really 14 weeks since the start of term 1?!

I apologise for not releasing a newsletter for term 1 but the unfortunate break of my shoulder really put a serious spanner in the works for me...thankfully not The Den! Thank you for all your well wishes and support during this time.

I cannot thank the staff who stepped into the breach enough and ensured that all sessions ran just as beautifully as always. Since then, Mrs Mason has taken on a more prominent role and is now running The Den on most Monday and Thursday nights - I know it's in great hands! Mrs Vowles and Katie both covered additional sessions and were adaptable, reliable and a whole heap of fun! Shara Durnell also took on some sessions, is our most recent member of staff and I'm delighted to say that she's joining us for two sessions a week as a regular gig! I know you'll welcome her fondly.

Yet again we've had a bumper 14 weeks of activity and lots of new faces joining us - welcome all! I hope you enjoy the pictures!

## STEM Activities Every Term - NEW!

Every term we drop everything for a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) Week. So far we have had a 'Just Add Water' and a 'Construction' Week. These included: making parachutes; colour splitting; taking flight; snowflake making; floating fruit; and luminous layers! Coming up we have 'Exploring Energy' and 'Domestic Science'. Activities are taken from a range of resources but predominantly from the British Science Association, Science and Engineering Week programmes for kids.



[www.nsew.org.uk](http://www.nsew.org.uk)





# Nuts for knitting!

We've had several projects over the last few months using fine motor skills when knitting, sewing and crafting. Children aged 11 to 4 have all got stuck in and been impressively successful with their results. The joy on their faces when they realised they were producing quality products has been a real delight!



# World Wildlife Federation

Meet Ihoho, the newest addition to The Den! We have adopted Ihoho as part of our continuing support of the WWF. We regularly update the children of his plight and help to educate them in the wider world this issue presents.

These great, glorious, fur-coated apes are some of our closest relatives. Sadly we may also be their biggest threat. People have been pushing into the mountain gorilla's forests in central Africa for decades – now there are only about 880 of these splendid beasts in the wild.

The main threat to gorillas is people and the associated increasing pressure on the gorilla's habitat. With so few individuals in the wild the mountain gorilla is listed as critically endangered. The good news is, their numbers have recently been rising. It's not too late for us to protect our mighty mountain cousins. Mountain gorillas are found in just two isolated groups – one in the Virunga volcanoes – spanning the borders of Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and one in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda, contiguous with DRC's Sarambwe Nature Reserve. They're found in high-altitude forests, where they mainly eat leaves and shoots.



Each week Ihoho will go home with a family to look after him. He travels light with his own suitcase. If you'd like to add anything to his case please feel free! Do let your child/ren take him on visits and record any events he might do! He brings with him a photo album which, at present, is very sparse! Please add any photos that might help us to track his exploring and help your child/ren to present back to us on his return!



## Outside Play

Unless the weather is really terrible we endeavour to go outside every session! This is really important to us, and even if it's just for 20 minutes it helps us all 'run off' the day.

We are sensible and do stay off muddy areas where possible but even the walk to the field can be wet.

We do have a selection of welly boots to borrow but we can't guarantee there will be a pair to fit everyone. If you are concerned about children's school shoes getting muddy, please send your child to The Den with a change of shoes/wellies.



# Solar System Project



## Holiday clubs

**Half Term:**

**Mon 13th February**

**8am - 6pm**

**INSET Day:**

**Mon 20th Feb**

**8am - 6pm**

## September 2017

**Incredibly - bookings are already being taken for September. If you have a REGULAR booking I will automatically save your sessions for September. Please contact me if you'd like these to change. Please note that Mon and Tues are very busy!**

# lego-tastic

**WOW! What a wonderful week that sparked the imagination of our creative children and we haven't stopped since!**

**We were really fortunate and hugely grateful for two enormous donations of lego from two very generous Clevedon residents. It gave us the resources to really go to town on 'lego week' and we created some fabulous activities for the kids to really stretch their learning through play.....making lego brick biscuits with smarties, lego bingo, lego relay, making lego ziplines, lego boardgame, making lego crayons, making the biggest tower, making balloon powered lego cars.**



# legotastic

**We love our lego at The Den - we feel it supports so many areas of a child's learning and play experiences. Did you know?**

The name 'lego' derives from the Danish phrase leg godt which translates as 'play-well'. The importance of play in the early years cannot be understated. As Dr. Nicola Pitchford, Lecturer of Developmental Psychology at Nottingham University explains:

*"Play facilitates the development of the basic building blocks of cognitive processing that are crucial for later acquired scholastic skills. Through play children learn to represent things symbolically and start to understand the relations between objects and events. Symbolic representations are the basis of many scholastic skills, such as literacy, writing, spelling and mathematics. Pretend play also helps children develop story-telling skills, supporting their development of imagination and grammar, both of which are necessary for understanding and creating literature."*

It can be easy to overlook the positive impact that Lego can have on a child's development, so I thought I'd run through a few of its key benefits....

## **Spatial Awareness**

Lego can be used as a tool to provide children with a structured understanding of objects including themselves, in a given space. A young toddler may start using the slightly larger Lego Duplo bricks and will undoubtedly stack them together and knock them down in a fairly unsophisticated and repetitive manner. But in doing so the toddler is naturally developing their hand-eye coordination and general spatial awareness.

## **Colour Recognition**

As well as recognising different shapes, a child can develop their colour recognition through playing with these colourful toy bricks. Research shows that children start to recognise colours from as early as 3-4 months, although in a very basic manner in that they mentally group similar colours together. As they grow older this recognition becomes more sophisticated and playing with toys like Lego can really promote this development.

## **Creativity and Role-Play**

Children naturally explore the boundaries of their imaginations and creativity. From an early age a child will get to know the world through play. A child's use of Lego will be quite basic when they are very young. However, as they grow older it is likely to become much more sophisticated as they create not only physical objects like buildings and vehicles, but they will often create characters and start to role play and reflect everyday situations like driving a car, shopping or cooking a meal. This can be a valuable learning experience in itself.

## **Social Development**

Lego is a toy that lends itself to social interaction and collaboration. Research suggests that children become friendlier and more comfortable in social situations when they work on cooperative construction projects. Research has shown for example, autistic children who attended play group sessions with toy blocks made greater social improvements than did children who were coached in the social use of language (Owens et al 2008; Legoff and Sherman 2006, Long-term outcome of social skills intervention based on interactive LEGO play. Autism.10 (4):317-29). Other research suggests that children who work on cooperative projects form higher-quality friendships (Roseth CJ, Johnson DW, and Johnson RT. 2008. Promoting Early Adolescents' Achievement and Peer Relationships: the Effects of Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Goal Structures. Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 134, No. 2: 223-246.).

## **Maths and Language Skills**

Lego can be used as a 'hands on' educational tool that can help children to develop their maths and language skills. A child learns much better when they are having fun and parents can harness this through the use of Lego. A parent can create simple maths scenarios using the bricks, for example by asking their child to count out the Lego bricks by colour, or counting the number of square versus rectangular bricks. In doing so, language skills can also be worked upon as a parent encourages their child to provide full answers to questions verbally. Lego can also be a great tool for developing and reinforcing problem solving skills. When a child starts school and has maths homework it is a great idea to work through the maths problems using Lego bricks as children usually find this fun and it can help them to visualise the numbers.

The use of block toys like Lego is a great way to promote learning from play and to aid a child's development. They are fantastic tools for parents, teachers and early years professionals which should be harnessed to its full potential. It is a toy that can be used from an early age and its application grows in use and sophistication as the child matures.

*Written by Sean McColgan*

## What's coming up this term?

A wonderfully eclectic mix a of one off sessions including: Drinking Straw Day! New Year Traditions, Wishing Tree, Party Blowers, New Year Party! Spaghetti Day - make a spaghetti tower team challenge, Bird Day - make a pine cone feeder, Popcorn Day, Milk Day, Code breaking.

World Wildlife Federation Week , Chinese New Year Week, STEM Week - Exploring Energy

..and all of the regular favourites each week including baking and our Royal Horticultural Society activities in the allotment and beyond!



## Reporting to you

As part of our ongoing development we have been creating reports for our EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) children. These reports went home to reception parents before Christmas and we have found the process really helpful in both sharing information with parents and learning more about what makes your children tick!

We believe this process will be a huge help for children of all ages and in this term we will endeavour to report to all parents regarding their children's experiences at The Den.

It will show how we are engaging the children in each of the 7 areas of learning as outlined in the EYFS. It will also give you an overview of what your child has been doing at The Den, the educational value to them and how they have responded to it. It will also give them an opportunity to express how they feel at The Den. This is not an educational report and does not make a judgement on your child's progress.

We will use this pupil feedback to shape what we do and how we structure activities, ensuring that sessions are tailored to your child's favoured learning styles.