

Vice Chair's report for Upstart Scotland AGM June 12th 2021

Play is the Way

I would just like to congratulate Sue Palmer and Carol Craig for putting together and promoting this book. Sue worked tirelessly supporting her authors, editing, suggesting and writing introductions to each section and then ran an amazingly efficient campaign to publicise the book. Carol and her team, thanks to Helen as well, continue to get the books out to all and sundry. Upstart has benefitted so much from this book in furthering the need for a kindergarten stage and showing how to support children and families from pre-birth to eight and also in the financial contribution from the Publishers to Upstart's campaign. It is an honour to have been part of this project.

Just Giving

Setting up a fundraiser to donate a book to every MSP and Director of Education, was a joy. Our treasurer's help in collecting the information for an Upstart Scotland Just Giving account was invaluable. Thank you David but it was taking too long to be ratified by Just Giving and our window of opportunity on the back of the enthusiasm for the book was diminishing so once it was agreed, the fund raising took place in my name.

Setting a target of £1,290 we ultimately raised £1,405 from 40 supporters. I cannot thank them enough especially our two sponsors who topped us up.

Julie Fisher said when donating "This book has truly raised my spirits during the Christmas lockdown. Such principled and affirming messages. I hope in time that a copy can reach all England's MPs!"

With this generosity, we have been able to donate a book to each MSP before Christmas, and enjoyed an Upstart photo opportunity with sleigh and reindeers- thank you to the group who were co-opted outside Holyrood to join in the process-, and to every Director of Education, often hand delivered by our supporters in very difficult lockdown circumstances - thank you to them.

Since then we have been able to continue our donations to think tanks, academics, play advocates, those in public health, educationalists and most recently to all our newly elected MSPs. There is still a little money left and I will be sending out books to other recipients from our extensive list.

Thank you to everyone who supported this initiative we couldn't have done it without you.

Play is the Way Book Club has been a joy and I am so glad that it took off. Thanks to Sue for organising it and to Brett Housego for supporting us technically. Zoom has been a steep learning curve for all of us but has meant we could continue to offer events like these. The recordings are an added bonus and a resource for the future. Our authors have been so generous in attending these events and sharing their expertise.

Election Hustings

After having two hustings, 5 years ago in Fife and in Edinburgh, it was imperative that we had one this year. Each of the main parties sent a representative and I would like to thank Jamie Greene, Carole Ford, Neil Gray, Ross Greer and Daniel Johnson for participating. I know that I learnt a lot about their views and it was wonderful to see Play is the Way being referenced. Maybe next time we will need a two hour session. Thank you to Tam Bailie for his skill at chairing the event offering all the candidates a fair share of the time allocation and once again to Brett for his technical support.

5th Year Celebrations- Upstart was 5 on the 16th of May and due to COVID our celebrations were lower key than we would have liked.

A planning zoom event with some of our local convenors was great fun and produced lots of wonderful ideas.

We:

Reposted and retweeted the Upstart Scotland launch film as it is still so relevant

Reposted the blog Sue wrote about 'The Importance of being 5' from January 2019.

Some supporters took to the woods- 5 being a wood anniversary and relevant for a group who are enthusiastic about outdoor play for our children,

Suzanne Axelsson wrote a blog for us about being a child of 5 in Sweden

Our newly elected MSPs got a copy of Play is the Way via the Parliament

Sue wrote a template letter for all MSPs and urged us to write to them - still time to do this!

Thank you to Zoe, Yvonne, Loreen and Clare for their enthusiastic participation in the zoom event.
Social media

has been busy with each group growing steadily. Hilary has continued to focus on the local Glasgow group and Upstart Scotland 3-7 Outdoor Play and it now has a membership of 5.8k. It disseminates very useful info on all things connected to the outdoors and is a great asset to our knowledge base.

Opening up Upstart Scotland Play in P1/2 to EYP practitioners as well as Registered Teachers has changed the focus of this group and although we have 7.9k members, the dynamism seems to have disappeared. Any suggestions as to how this can be invigorated are welcome. Other groups have been started across the country so hopefully they are replacing the need for this site. It will be wonderful when we can all work together collaboratively and feel able to share without fear.

During the last lockdown a new group was started, Upstart Scotland online play in P1/2 which in a very short time has 50 members. This group is in abeyance but can be resurrected if needed.

Our local groups of which there are ... really need an input from our local supporters. The zoom conversation with a small group of convenors was useful and this could be a good way of supporting each other. I would like to thank all the convenors for sticking with us through this journey. If anyone would like to support a group, please DM me on Facebook. The more the merrier!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Give Them Time for their amazing achievement in getting the law changed so that all children who are not 5 and wish to have another nursery year will be fully funded from August 2023 and hopefully in the future this will become the norm with parents choosing play before the three Rs for our under 5s.

As for volunteering to do the Secretary's job at last years AGM, this completely went out of my head. But with the support of Jennifer Gall our admin assistant and the hard work of Sue who is the driving force of this organisation, Upstart has continued to flourish. May it continue until it has achieved its aim.

Kate Johnston 30th May 2021