

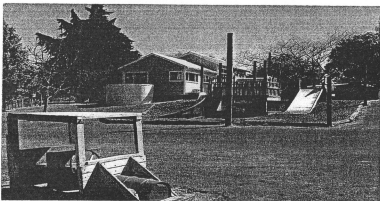


# OTAMAURI PLAYCENTRE

## 40th ANNIVERSARY

"At Playcentre we believe that you, the parents, are the most important people in your children's lives. You are your children's most important teacher, ever. They will learn more from you than they will from all the other teachers and lecturers that they'll ever have- put together- and that's because a person's entire life is dependent on what happens to them in the early years. To that end, Playcentre is about educational opportunities for you as a parent, so that you can get skills and ideas to do your job, even better than you are doing"

Pennie Brownlee, author of 'Magic Places'



## Introduction and welcome

Fortieth birthdays always seem to take the 'happy birthdayed' by surprise. One minute you are 25, young, fun and crazy busy and then you turn around and while you're still 'young, fun and crazy busy'- 15 years have passed! You are officially a responsible middle aged member of society.

Theoretically, you've learnt a little in the interim. You're not as 'green', you're more worldly wise - more polished. Ideally, you've thrown away the shoulder pads, taken up suntan lotion and can order a coffee in the city without making the waiter smirk.

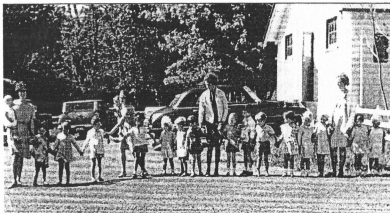
Not much surprises you but there's always something to laugh about and always something to feel grateful for. Your focus has shifted from you, the individual, to your family. You have built a history together, with piles of photos of your offspring and a stable of funny stories from the 'glory days', many of which get funnier after a couple of glasses of wine with cronies.

Otamauri Playcentre had its last 'do' as a 25 year old. Many of you here were also present in 1991 for the official opening of the centre extension. This occasion is to celebrate her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. She is not an 'old bird', she is still young, fun and crazy busy and she is wearing well. Some of the systems are different and times have changed since the heyday of 30 on her roll and two sessions but she's here for the long haul. She insists on looking after herself and while she might look quite different to when she was at the shearers quarters across the road or even the Sherenden Hall she's the same person. She is a well loved member of our community who has played with and helped prepare our young people for the future and who has supported young families in this district for generations. She loves a good party. Enjoy!

Thank you to all contributors.

Stephanie Russell

## History of the Sherenden/Otamauri Playcentre



1966- 1974

Sherenden Playcentre began 40 years ago in the Sherenden Hall. It was formed by Jillyan Hing (Greville) and Audrey Stuart. Both women were local with young children and keen to initiate some activity for their preschoolers.

*'I had a three year old and I was thinking three year old things. I remember sitting at Audrey's piano and her saying 'Let's get a playgroup cracking.'*

*So we did. Mustered a few more troops and we were away." J Hing*

The playgroup was launched as a Playcentre with the formal training and support offered by the new Playcentre Association. Playcentre was deemed to be more flexible than a Kindergarten (which, offputtingly, would have required criteria, so many sessions and a certain roll from the fledgling Sherenden group.)

The first equipment was donated by local families and the first generation of working bee workers began fencing safe play areas, constructing aluminium trays for wet and sand play and polyuretheneing wooden blocks.

*"It was a bit of a hassle. Putting all the equipment away every session, back into the second hand wardrobe we'd bought- which lived in the Ladies toilet."*

*"I remember giving away all the kid's presents. The red wooden train, my sister's cane pram, they all suddenly went to the Sherenden Playcentre." J Hing*

The Playcentre pulled mothers and children from all the surrounding districts and served as an important social focus.

*"There were plenty of kids. We got quite a muster. They even came from the edges of Crownthorpe. We picked up kids from MacNeill's cottages on the way through. A couple of mums and a couple of kids and the car was full."*

Sherenden Playcentre gave children the opportunity to meet and make friends with their local peers and then it fed them back to their district schools. Perhaps this intensified the local school rivalry and sense of competition. Mrs Hing is sure that the skills learnt and the children's socialisation helped to make their transition to school easier. She firmly believes that with Playcentre, like anything, the more you got involved, the more you got out of it. This was a maxim which was to recur in many a President's end of year report over the coming 40 years.

It is interesting reading back over the monthly meeting minutes books. Names appear of women who did "sterling service" for years to help Playcentre (like Alice Munro and Audrey Stuart) and names of local families who were to reappear over each generation: Yule, Nowell-Usticke, Connor, Ralph and Hindmarsh, and Sherwood. The cliché 'the more things change, the more they stay the same' is evidenced from the beginning of the records with the same need to get the most from a limited pool of funds, expose the children to a wide range of interesting and challenging activities and organize the supervision and mother help -while always giving a glimpse of everyday life.

*"It was suggested that a letter be written to those in authority, asking that School Sports (Swimming, Athletics, D and A, and Winter Sports, be held on a day other than Tuesday. Our seating, tables and other equipment are often taken from the Hall without previous request." 1972*

*"Great fuss over the missing biscuits. Mrs A Munro spoke to the Head Teacher and he in turn taxed his class 5c each. Several parents objected. It was therefore decided that the tin of biscuits be kept in the Play centre cupboard." 1971*

*"The financial statement was read - we made a profit of one dollar last year!" 1972*

*"The meeting ended at about 9.15pm- but we still didn't get home in time for Alan Whicker's programme about New Zealand women."*

#### 1973-1987

*"The President welcomed a good crowd of mothers on a very wet muddy night to the first meeting in our new Centre." 12 March 1973*

At the suggestion of Mrs Belinda Hindmarsh, Playcentre shifted to the shearer's quarters on Alnwick Farm on Otamauri Rd. The grounds were safe for the children and at last all the equipment had a permanent home. Sherenden Playcentre thrived at this new address and worked to build up a healthy roll. -at one stage it ran two sessions a week.

*"8.7.75 Fine day- Dough, roller and finger painting, woodwork, family, -Forestry Fire engine came for children to view fire demonstration- great interest from children, especially boys."*

Over the next fourteen years, the centre worked to establish many of the routines and practices we are familiar with as Playcentre parents. Building up the library was a focus

as was the institution of a lending jigsaw library. Working bees were commonplace as were the various fundraising activities undertaken. Links were forged with some of the city centres and Association training was ongoing for those training.

*"Judith Henry then talked on Creative work at Playcentre and how children gain pleasure from handling different materials like clay, dough and paints. Daphne Goddard then talked briefly about the blocks and how children learn basic arithmetic from them. Half, double, big, small, long etc. She also told us the correct way to stack the blocks after each session."*



New names came and went but some people offered years of help. Ann Sherwood, Val and Noel Galbraith, Mary Paton, Beryl Oliver, Daphne Goddard, Mary Drummond and Norah Robertson were clearly stalwart supporters during this time. Differences in the day to day running of the sessions often come down to technology and social expectation. "Smoking is discouraged" crops up regularly in the minutes but appeared to make little impact on the Playcentre smokers, music was enjoyed to the background of records and some training was facilitated through films and the projector. Playcentre wasn't yet 'pc' in 1978: "*September 12 Haumoana visited. Lambs made from toilet rolls, pipe cleaners and sheep's wool.*"

*"It was decided to approach the Marriage Guidance Council to see if a speaker and slides on Sex Education can address the meeting next year." 1974*

*"24.6.75 - Very cold- dough, paint, manipulative, family, lots of physical exercises and actions to music from record, singing, activity made pasted doll, most interested."*

Some children's names appeared regularly- for accidents eg:

*"28.10.75 Paul Sherwood, hammered his thumb whilst at woodwork table- little bleeding-Listerine administered." (!)*

*"It has been an interesting exercise to read the Minute & Roll Books that have recorded the history of the Sherenden/Otamawi Playcentre. The rises and falls in the roll over the last 40 years would show a similar pattern if graphed, I feel, and my time began in 1973 on the rise and ended with a fall in the late '70's, but rose quickly again in the early '80's. I remember looking forward very much to joining Playcentre with our boys, to meet other young mums and discuss the trials and tribulations of bringing up highly energetic little boys, and to be reassured that all was well and our parenting was on the right track! Trips to town were fortnightly in those early days and the friendships formed between the children and mothers, meant regular exchanges of children outside Playcentre, and some much appreciated 'time out' for busy mums.*

*The term now used 'Parents as First Teachers' - Playcentre in the early '70's, required and encouraged us all to learn about how our children learned through different forms of play, and many workshops - home and away - visiting speakers of interest and reciprocal Playcentre visits, were ongoing each year. It was positive education for the parents and fun for the children. And Fathers were not forgotten either, with special Playcentre days for them to accompany their children and 'extra special' morning teas at the Working Bees! It is a pleasure to see a new generation attending Otamauri Playcentre with the same dedication and commitment as those parents and children of the past 40 years."*

*Ann Sherwood and Mary Paton*

### The Eighties and early Nineties



In the Eighties a fresh crop of volunteers followed their children to Playcentre. Linda Ward, Jill Simon, Nanette Roydhouse, Kirsty Dysart, Keren Wallace, Vanetta Rosenberg, Pam Gunson, Jane Fountaine, Kathy Monson, Rose Cambell, Marion Croad, Sue Guy, Julie Holst, Leonie Smith, Chris Sivewright, Chris Dunn, Lyn Elliott, Sue Dingle, and Vanessa Kernot (among others) were keen officeholders of the time. Playcentre was well

attended and with such numbers was a buzzy place. With such a high level of support, a move across the road to bigger and brighter things seemed appropriate.

Linda Ward's section on the history of the Sherenden/ Otamauri Playcentre in the local history 'West to the Annie', her memories below and her notes for the opening of the '91 extension have been invaluable for this booklet. She says of the shift: "*It gradually became apparent that as this building aged, it was slipping well below standards required to run a Playcentre. Then, at the end of 1986, Otamauri School with only a very small roll, decided to close. This seemed like the opportunity we had been waiting for and in 1987 armed with tractors, trucks and a front end loader we made the move. We felt as though we rattled around in the building and we were fairly lost in the play area- but it was a great move*

*After a year of uncertainty we finally officially took over the building in 1988. It then seemed appropriate to change our name to Otamauri. Once again, with a healthy roll of over 30, we began 2 sessions a week."*





### *Memories of my time at Playcentre*

*I first started going to Playcentre with Peter, my oldest child in 1978. In those days it was in the Hindmarsh's old shearers' quarters. Not a lot of room to move around in and there were lots of children attending in the years from 1978 to 1984. During this time I was treasurer for a few years. We never had a huge amount of money but there was always enough. It was a cold place in the winter and hard to heat because of all the little rooms but we were lucky to have the use of it.*

*One or two parents would be responsible for the main activities each term. Each session consisted of general play, morning tea, one main activity, a singing and story session and then more general play, a combination of organised and chosen activities. There was a roster for parents to provide morning tea, both for the adults and the children.*

*Playcentre life was not so rigid then. We could make necklaces out of cooked, dyed macaroni, make patterns with rice, dye spaghetti bright colours and throw it at the walls to see what patterns it made and there was, of course, the ever-popular play dough. My children enjoyed the messy activities so I often had to put them all straight into the bath when we got home. There were some requirements regarding equipment (how many times were those blocks counted?!!) but regulations were not as strict as they are today.*

*I had a break from Playcentre for a couple of years and then started going again with Joanna once I felt the need to have a break from home and to meet up with other mothers, because, after all, Playcentre is as much about the mothers as it is about the children, at least in a country area. By this time I was the really experienced one, having – horrors – four children! I somehow managed to get back my old treasurer's job and so Playcentre life carried on, except that from about this time on the rules started getting more rigid, parents were required to do more training, there was talk about needing so many credits to run sessions and there were issues of space – so many square metres per child and so on. But the rules had to be followed if funding was to be received, so we did as required, often struggling to meet the criteria simply because of parent numbers, an issue that is common in country areas and one that we often felt the townies who made the rules did not understand.*

*Playcentre was always an enjoyable place to be as the children so obviously loved being there. I enjoyed the workshops that were held either at our Playcentre by people from town, or when we went to workshops at other Playcentres as it was always good to see what others were doing. There were some incredibly enthusiastic people involved.*

*Working bees were a lot of fun as we got to know the fathers then, their hard work creating the ambitious projects dreamed up by the mothers being rewarded with a social hour or two afterwards.*

*Linda Ward*

*There's nothing quite like warm play dough. There was always someone making a fresh batch early on a Tuesday session and then many hands rolling, cutting and eating it! The library corner was always full of cool books with kids always eager to listen when a story was being read. The best dress -ups ever were in the wardrobe with hats, purses, gloves, dresses, stoles and shoes, shoes, shoes. There were many happy children prancing around acting out all sorts of imaginary games. Of course the Play Centre slide was the best with children, toys and sand going down at full speed. The plastic bikes were a very sort after item and it was always a race to the shed to get one first. One special memory was of a fizzing volcano being made in the sandpit with baking soda and vinegar. Lots of very fascinated and intrigued faces.*

*Playcentre provided great adult contact and support. As well as the session contact we were pretty social. One memorable event was organised on a lovely Spring Saturday. A mystery tour saw us travel all over HLB from Havelock to Napier. We had a superb day finishing with drinks at East Pier in the late afternoon looking out over the sea. A great fundraiser and social event for the centre was the Casino night which was held in the Sherenden Hall and attended by most people in the District. It was loads of fun and a great community get together.*  
*Di and Emma Harris*



Parents were rostered as supervisors depending on the level of training they had achieved and turns were taken to provide the weekly morning tea, no mean feat when the roll reached up to 30 children in the late 80s.

During this period a massive amount of work was put in by the local community, the Hawkes Bay Playcentre Association and the Ministry of Education to meet minimum standards. The play area was resited and the centre saw new fencing, painting, building the sandpit and fort, laying carpet and lino, renovating the old toilet area and installing a new sink and zip. (There are countless photos and memories of when the Army came to town to build the fort-staying en masse at the Squash courts.) But despite this enormous effort the centre still didn't meet the minimum required level of floor space- hence the extended centre.

*"For a while we tried to resist this, feeling we had so much outdoor space that surely this would compensate. We felt we managed on wet days- until we realized that half the families stayed away when it was raining as it was so congested. We've now revised our opinion and wonder how we managed." 1991 extension speech*

It must have felt like the Centre was under the Ministry spotlight for some time. Not only were the buildings being audited so too was the children's learning and the implementation of charter goals. ERO's first visit was in 1990, with a good report. It recognized the unique features and strengths of Otamauri Playcentre and the suggested changes created positive spin offs like the almost 100% parent training response and helped to enlarge the size of the building.

*"[It] is meeting the needs of young families who are relatively isolated due to a recession in the rural area. This prevents easy access to a wider choice of preschool education available in the city.*

*Parents and Community are to be commended for the commitment and hard work that has been put into the centre to make it an attractive and happy learning centre for the children in the Otamauri area."*

In amongst the highs and lows of property and ERO issues the children continued to enjoy full sessions and centre trips.

*"Early in the year we held a Pet Day, a number of us represented our centre at Dinosaur Day also. We had a visit from Walnut the clown- I guess even clowns have their off days too! We have had several trips away including the Omnigym, Marine Parade beach and paddling pool, St Andrews preschool music group and the Ashcroft Honey House..." L Smith's Annual report 91/92*

Socially, the parents organized and enjoyed memorable fundraising nights – notably the '50s dance, the Pink and Purple Dance and the Las Vegas nights.

From the early 90s the regulations regarding parent training became more stringent and the centre continued to develop new ways to encourage parent training. Supervisors needed to have a required number of points before they were eligible to take sessions, a

situation that was not always easy when the roll drops, so trained supervisors from outside the Playcentre have been employed at times to fill this function.

Reading 40 years of Minutes books highlights the difficulties of running a Playcentre. Every year, and every session, requires a high level of commitment and effort. Otamauri Playcentre has coped admirably with the external challenges put to it but, historically, it also feels the troughs of seasonal commitments on the farms, slumps in rolls, transient families in the area, and ebbs and flows of member involvement. Equally, the Centre is fondly remembered for its pivotal social role in the community - and sometimes compared very favourably to other Centres.

*"...For the first time last week they lifted the cover off the sandpit, I was beginning to doubt that they actually had one. Leanne is having withdrawal symptoms from no mucky play and longs to see Sue demonstrating her tricky footwork on the fingerpaint table....I hereby pledge if I win Lotto to attend Otamauri Playcentre twice a week until Leanne starts school." S Sivewright 95*

There is a natural and expected turnover of people involved in a preschool centre. Other women to make their mark in the mid nineties included: Di Harris, Robyn McDougal, Wendy Wilson, Lesley Roil, Kate D'Ath, Sally Cunningham, Kirsty Hill and Anthea Yule, some of these women would provide leadership into the late nineties-(not into their late nineties!!)

#### 1996-2000

The minutes and President's Reports of this period show an awareness of the Centre's position within the community and an understanding that things were changing rapidly in early childhood education and in society in general. The impact of the amalgamation of Waiwhare and Sherenden Schools on Otamauri was hoped to be largely positive and there was an appreciation that it was fortunate not to be competing with other centres.

*"We have a unique situation at our rural centre in that we are not threatened by the mushrooming of other Early Childhood Centres. This is favourable for the survivability at Otamauri Playcentre. We must not abuse this aspect." R McDougal 97*

Anthea Yule in her reports as President often placed Otamauri Playcentre within a larger perspective - praising the positive traditions of the rural community centre but underlining the need for an undiminished level of support.

*We are witnessing a change in the makeup of the rural community. This is a nation wide phenomenon that has seen farm cottages sold or rented and lifestylers or tenants move in. This has been reflected at Otamauri as people commute to town and cannot make the necessary commitment to the Centre. This place is not for everyone. "If you choose to stay at Playcentre a level of commitment is required and I believe that as a group we have established what we consider to be the minimum requirements." 1998*

A second ERO visit in 1998 gave a glowing report of the Playcentre's quality of education and care. The report commented favourably on the interactions between

adults, and adults and children. The team: Anthea, Kirsty Hill, Ann Loye, Amanda Cheetham, Jose' McGovern, Jeannie Ward, Danny Ward, Anne Burnside, Shona Jones and Jacqui Paku et al clearly operated like a well oiled machine! Parent education, property maintenance and fundraising were ably undertaken. A second session and an afternoon session were unsuccessfully trialled but the water tank was successfully moved. The Playcentre was in good heart, even if the President could see storm clouds on the horizon.

*"The effect of the rural downturn is becoming more noticeable at Otamauri and in wider Hawkes Bay. Farmers can't afford to retire and their children can't afford to farm. Our projected rolls don't look good. Children remain in the cities or overseas where the opportunities are greater. Farms that might have employed a married couple and perhaps a shepherd 20 years ago are now run by the farmer and maybe his wife or partner. That is if she isn't working in town to supplement the farm income. We live in fluid times and it is not only the farming community that is forced to change. A job today may be gone tomorrow. I cannot remember a time in my life when there was so much uncertainty about."*

Sometimes the bright spot in the doom and gloom about the future proved to be the continued enjoyment of the children of the facilities, the activities and each other.

*"We are here because they love it!" A Yule 99*

Many of the children who had frequented the Playcentre and their parents who had supported the centre for years moved to school. The roll dropped from 30 to 13 in 3 years. Worse was to come.

*"I would like to wish all of you who are around for the future all the best. I don't assume that things are going to be easy for you especially in the next year but I am confident that you will see a turn around in no time. Remember what you put into this place will reward you by what you and your children get out of it. We are here for our children's future and we have a great community asset that has been used by many for over three decades." K Hill 2000*

#### Messy Big White

Reflection makes me tired. Where does life go? It only seems like yesterday that pre-schoolers and Playcentre days ruled my life. Big White, the family wagon was forever laden with my children, other people's children, car seats, nappy bags, food, small backpacks, wet paintings, bits of wood and other interesting creations. Meeting agendas, the minutes, reports, discarded socks, shoes, clothes, half eaten fruit and crumbs. The car was never clean and always on the road.

My Playcentre involvement was busy and rewarding. Emma, Thomas, Henry and Charles speak fondly of their time there. It has helped them become the people they are.

The Playcentre philosophy is a good one. It grabs you. While founded on the principle of learning through play, the empowerment for adult and child can be enormous. Positive

participation brings growth through mutual support, the sharing of knowledge, teamwork, meeting new challenges, overcoming fears, learning new skills, the ownership of decision making, social development and the forging of new friendships.

You walk through the door as equals. Busy parents doing your best.

While overcoming obstacles as an individual the group also has to face the challenges of a changing world. Each group has its problems. Playcentre is a living fluid place, constantly evolving. Work done by previous generations echo. Groups that embrace new ideas and adapt to the ever changing regulations ensure its survival. Changes need to be made with respect for the past and an eye on the future. It is the problem solving required to make these changes that make the group strong. A bit like being in the front line at times!! Friendships are made for life.

The children still reminisce about their time at Playcentre. Emma was creative when still, and ran about the rest of the time. Thomas and Charles spent all their time on the digger (we bought one in the end). Henry loved talking in depth to every parent that would listen or couldn't get away.

They participate fully in all aspects of life and tackle things without fear of failure or ridicule. I believe this stems from their time spent at the Otamauri Playcentre. It was an enriching and stimulating environment.

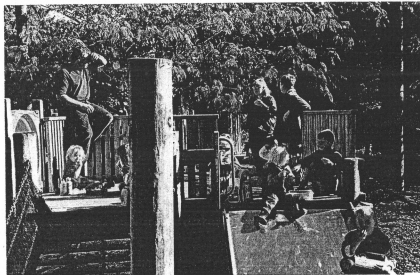
Big White has been superceded by the Stealth Bomber which Emma and Thomas both drive. The wet paintings and imaginative creations have been replaced with smelly tennis shoes, stinky shin pads and doubtful CD's.

Anthea Yule

#### 2001-2006

By 2002 the roll had dropped to five. Prescient comments had forecast the roll drop of young children in the district. Many of the local preschool children travelled into town with their parents to attend daycare centres as they worked and other town centres offered new and more accessible programmes to attract a rural market. A dedicated few scaled down the expectations and day to day organisational detail of the Playcentre which had run at full capacity, with full parental supervision only years before. It became a battle to ensure that the correct number of first aiders and level 1, 2 and most importantly 3 certificate holders were present to keep the session open.

*Although our numbers have dwindled all the way down to 5 permanents and 2 casuals, I feel that we as a small rural centre have done tremendously well, not only by keeping morale high, but by giving the children everything that they had in previous years." J Paku 02*



The 2004 ERO report addressed the positives of the centre and, in the light of a new set of administrative expectations, suggested improvements to self review practices, programme planning and individual profiles.

*"Parents collectively supervise and educate their children, providing sound education and care in a spacious, welcoming learning environment. High Parent- child ratios are a feature of the service. Many adults in this rural setting live in isolated situations or on farms. They consequently appreciate the contact with other parents their attendance at sessions allows. Children's sense of belonging is enhanced as links between the Playcentre and home are established. ...Relationships between children and adults are affirming. Parents are good role models promoting a calm atmosphere conducive to learning. They support their children in their learning and development. Children's emotional well being is nurtured." ERO report 2004*

Jacqui Paku, Ann Burnside, Jeannie Ward and Amanda Cheetham admirably carried the Playcentre through a low roll period.

The Centre now has more children on its roll than at any other point this decade. The 40<sup>th</sup> reunion and the most recent ERO visit hitting the same month this year has meant plenty of work for all present members!

The aims of the original founders are still being met in every session at the Playcentre. It still serves the same important educational and social role for parents and children in 2006 as it did in 1966. A country Playcentre becomes more than a focus for early education and more a community meeting place. Playcentre is where the 'clientele' are always young and when the parents are new as well. It is where the children learn to socialise within the local community and the parents get to practice too. The vexed issue of space has been well addressed and the facilities are enviable. As with the local primary schools, the roll is a continuing concern. Times have changed and there is a choice of early childhood education for many families. Good will, a sense of humour, a strong social network, flexibility, trial and error, support from the Association and commitment from parents and the wider community- these have all kept Otamauri Playcentre going over the past 40 years and they are what will help it maintain its course for the next 40.

*"Since the year 2000, our roll has fluctuated many times. I remember one year we managed to successfully operate with only four families and six children. Recently we had three new families turn up all at once, almost doubling our roll instantly. We currently have 11 families that attend regularly.*

*Today's parents seem busier than they were 40 years ago, town is now more accessible and offers different types of Early Childhood education and Childcare services that offer convenience and suit some of today's parents needs.*

*Over the last 6 years we have accomplished many things, a new sandpit, replaced the iron on the old part of the building, replaced the guttering and painted the exterior of all the buildings, and most recently repainted the office and the toilet area, upgraded the office and kitchen storage, finally purchased a new baby change table, replaced the gate in the kitchen and made our baby area safe and secure. Just to name a few!*

*We are still here today because of the families that have been before us and the families that are here today, it is with their commitment that we shall still be here in another 40 years.*

*Over the years many families have come and gone and thankfully some are still here. Each and every one of them has left an impression of their presence somewhere in our Playcentre's history."*

*J Paku*



