

MINUTES OF THE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021 AT Stepping stones and
VIA ZOOM AT 7PM

Present at Stepping Stones

Claire Wells	Chairman
Barbara Jansen	Company Secretary
Debbie Wickham	Manager
Sheila Coles	
Claire Love	
Tim Adlam	
Natalie Domett	
Clair Matthews	
Judy Hennessey	

Present via zoom

Gill Williams	Shruthi Kumar
Jane Bruton	Sue Spittles
Jane Hammett	Paris Meakin
Marianne Hamley	Helen Thomas
Natalie Elsbury	Brenda Shelbourne
Helen Norcott	Helen Hulbert
Sarah Clements	Lisa Carpenter-Taylor
Fiona Ladd	Alison Gratton
Sarah Cottle	Miranda Taylor

Good Evening!

Firstly, thank you for attending the AGM. It's lovely to see you all.

We are legally required to hold an AGM and enjoy doing so to give the opportunity to any interested party to see into the organisation and ask any questions.

We have quite a number of items to get through. I hope that you have all seen a copy of the agenda.

Please allow the speaker to make their presentation and raise your hand or press the hand symbol when questions are invited.

1. Apologies were received from

Chrissy D'Arcy apologies were received after the meeting.

2. Minutes of the AGM of 2019

You should all have received a copy of the 2020 AGM minutes. Please could a member of the committee propose that these are a true reflection of the meeting?

Proposed	Sheila Coles
Seconded	Gill Williams

3. Chairman's Report. – Claire Wells

Stepping into the position of chair last summer, whilst entirely daunting following Martin's great leadership, has been such an honour. I want to thank my fellow trustees and Stepping Stones staff for their support. In the twelve months that this meeting relates to, Stepping Stones continued to provide its invaluable support through three lockdowns.

As Churchill said 'Never, never, never give up'. Whilst I am in no way comparing the lovely Debbie to Churchill, I want to thank Debbie for her calm professionalism, fighting spirit and steady guidance throughout this challenging time.

I would like to thank Barbara for all the wonderful work that she does to keep Stepping Stones running, for her planning of this AGM and all committee meetings, but also for meeting the treasurer responsibilities whilst the position has been vacant. Barbara's careful management of the accounts have minimised the impact of the pandemic and helped us to retain substantial reserves.

MINUTES OF THE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021 AT Stepping stones and
VIA ZOOM AT 7PM

To Judy, Sarah-Louise, all the key workers, play leaders and volunteers, a massive thank you for your flexibility, tenacity and patience. Speaking as the mother of a child who attended Stepping Stones, an the mother of a child who was badly affected by the first lockdown, I can only imagine how your jobs have become so much more challenging since April 2020, not only overcoming the physical restrictions but also the mental damage.

The fact that your service to the children was able to continue in a variety of forms will have been a lifeline for the children and the parents. The communication with parents, even just knowing that they're speaking to someone who understands their position, will have been such a comfort.

Thank you to my fellow trustees for their continued support of Stepping Stones. Overall, this has been an incredibly challenging time and a period of significant change. The quality of the service Stepping Stones have provided to children with additional needs and their families has not altered from the truly outstanding service provided pre-pandemic. Through everyone's involvement and dedicated support, the charity has weathered the storm.

Now over to Barbara for the Finance and Fundraising Reports.

4. Combined Financial and Fundraising Report. – Barbara Jansen

The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to have an unprecedented impact on business and the economy nationally. The activities of Stepping Stones continue to be compromised by the pandemic but we have been very fortunate that the financial impact of the pandemic has not impacted on the reserves we hold.

Stepping Stones is very well recognised and supported locally and this has been reflected in the number of donations/grants that we have been able to secure over the year despite our inability to organise fundraising events due to national Lockdowns and the restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic.

In these difficult times for all charities and business we have been grateful for all the support we have received.

Our Principal sources of funding during the Financial year ending March 2021 came from

- Service Level Agreement – Core funding from Wiltshire Council
- Nursery Education Grant (NEG)
- Disability Access fund (DAF)

However £23,075 still came from donations and grants during the year and this was only £1551 less than the previous year.

Our financial position remains good and we have sought alternative ways to successfully fundraise within the limitations of lockdown.

Operational costs continue to be tightly controlled. Despite the need for enhanced cleaning and increased expenditure on PPE and consumables our running costs have remained in line with previous years.

Income and Expenditure continued to be reviewed at each Management Committee meeting.

The outcome for the financial year concluded has exceeded expectations and we had a better outcome than predicted when a revised budget had to be hastily drawn up and agreed at the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemic. Our expected loss was much lower than predicted and can be absorbed by the substantial reserves held.

The net movement of funds for the year ending 31st March 2021 amounted to a small surplus of £1,736 against (2020 £19,155)

MINUTES OF THE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021 AT Stepping stones and
VIA ZOOM AT 7PM

We were able to successfully change our grant applications to both St James Trust and Westbury Council to reflect the sudden need for different equipment and different working practices that have been necessary over the year.

St James Trust provided us with funds to purchase 2 new laptops which have enabled us to attend the many TEAMS/Zoom meetings that have been taking place.

We continued to benefit as the Charity of the Year from fundraising done by Santander who were also able to secure match funding from money raised in branch and at a successful Zoom quiz night.

Barclays who were unable to hold their annual curry and quiz night decided to do a Step Out for Stepping Stones walking 1,128,945 steps between them. Each steps raising money for us.

Not to be left out the staff team got behind the 2.6 challenge set up to help small charities. Raising funds for Stepping Stones during the lockdown creating inventive ways of getting friends and families to sponsor them. Running backyard marathons, cycling, hula hooping, doing Jumping Jacks, seat drops/flipping on the trampoline, ice bucket challenge, making cards, cream teas the list is endless and inspiring. Thank you everyone

In a very uncertain time when all plans and activities were severely compromised by the Covid 19 pandemic we have managed to remain in a strong financial position ready to reopen all our services fully in September 2021.

5. Managers' Report

This year when all of the uncertainty and disruption brought by Covid seemed unending everyone at Stepping Stones felt the full impact of our responsibility to innovate and respond quickly to meeting the needs of children and families who required District Specialist Centre support.

Providing services during a Pandemic has proved interesting and brought a new set of challenges

Amongst many things we had to consider

- How to best address the concerns of increasingly anxious parents who had to wait for longer and longer to see agencies they had been referred to.
- How to remain Covid compliant while continuing to provide the type of assessments, sessional support and outreach that would still be valued by families and colleagues.

We were right to assume that our time and skills would be stretched and a reorganisation of our sessions and staffing would be required to ensure that this could be achieved.

During April and May 2020 sessions did close and we quickly upskilled to provide versions of our support on line. From June sessions resumed but by ceasing Stay and Play sessions, Home Visits, creating 1:1 assessment sessions and maintaining a 'no dual placement policy' for children who attended sessions we helped minimise social contacts.

Stepping Stones supported 128 children over the year, many in partnership with other early year's settings where we provided assessment and outreach support through on line meetings, phone contact and visits wherever possible.

It is testament to the determination and the 'can do attitude' of the whole team that despite the changes enforced upon us by Covid restrictions children and parents continued to still feel well supported. This was highlighted by the Bristol standards Quality Assurance validation group, who on receipt of our submission this year commented,

'Your reflective reports highlight the impact from the pandemic and how you have tried to overcome any barriers to ensure that you reach all your children at a time when face to face contact has been so limited.

MINUTES OF THE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021 AT Stepping stones and
VIA ZOOM AT 7PM

We have often referred to the fact that Stepping Stones as a charity fills the gap between what should be available for children with special needs and what is actually provided. We were born out of a need for parents to receive practical help and support for their child's special needs at the earliest intervention. Our role in facilitating this has never been more necessary than over this past year when barriers however necessary served to reduce children's access to other agency provision and support.

So congratulations and a big thank you to all who work with me at Stepping Stones. As colleagues we have supported each other throughout these changing times and you have all certainly supported me. We have also experienced some changes to the team - this was the year where Natalie, thanks to baby Elsie, took maternity leave and we also waved goodbye to Becky. We welcomed Helen H, Lisa and Carolyn into the team. Together we held our nerve and have risen to meet some considerable challenges and as such have experienced much success.

The Management Committee, all volunteers, are often the unseen and unsung heroes of Stepping Stones providing their time to share guidance advice and hold responsibility for the direction of our charitable work. Martin Coles eventually managed to retire from Stepping Stones after 16 years and we miss him but have been fortunate to have Claire Wells take over the commitment of Chair.

Sheila Coles is now standing down from the Committee this evening after 12 years. Prior to joining the Committee Sheila worked for many years as a much respected member of the Playroom team and I believe personifies everything that is valued at SS. She arrived full of good will, initially to volunteer and her passion and commitment to making a difference to the children and families we work with has been outstanding. She is always kind, caring, very professional and I have benefitted from her support both personally and professionally throughout my time at Stepping Stones. I will miss her very much and thank her for everything.

Stepping Stones continues to demonstrate that as an organisation we do adapt efficiently to outside pressures without compromising our core values. This strength will prove vital in the coming months/years as children with special needs encounter ever more convoluted pathways to services. This noticeable but unwelcome development is in direct response to services experiencing lengthening waiting lists which impact on their capacity levels and the inevitable tightening of their thresholds.

Stepping Stones cannot escape the impact of these pressures but we can choose how we respond to them and I have every confidence that it will continue to be in the best interests of the children and families we work with.

The accounts have been audited and will be available in the office shortly should anyone wish to view a full copy.

Proposed Martin Coles
Seconded Gill Williams

6. Appointment of auditors:

I'd now like to seek approval of all the reports, plus the accounts which are available in the office to view from Monday, and also seek the approval of the re-appointment of Monahans as Auditors.

I would like to propose, please may I have a second?

Proposed Claire Wells
Seconded Claire Love

10.. Election of the management committee.

MINUTES OF THE
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON THURSDAY 1 JULY 2021 AT Stepping stones and
VIA ZOOM AT 7PM

Firstly, a big thank you to Sheila for her twelve years of service on the committee and many years of work prior to this in the playrooms.

(Sheila was presented with a small gift of appreciation from Stepping Stones)

The following members are willing to seek re-election to the committee:

Gill Williams, Tim Adlam, Fiona Ladd, Alison Gratton, Claire Love, Sue Spittles, Natalie Dommatt and myself.

Paris Meakin is seeking election to the committee and is willing to accept the role of Treasurer.

Stepping Stones welcomes the support of parents, past or present, and those from professions that support Stepping Stones. If you know anyone who would be interested, who may like to attend a meeting to see if it is for them, please put them in touch with Debbie or Barbara.

Judy Hennessey will continue as staff representative.

11. Any other business

We have reviewed and revised all of our policies and procedures as necessary over the year as required by Ofsted and under our Bristol Standards Quality Assurance review. These policies can be viewed on board outside the office.

Claire Wells then opened the floor to any questions.

Tim Adlam asked– how many committee members from the professions that support Stepping Stones do we have?

Sue Spittles is a former Speech and Language Therapist, and former staff members are on the committee.

There were no other question from the meeting

Claire Well then thanked to everyone for attending the meeting and drew it to a close

The next management committee meeting was subsequently arranged for arranged for Thursday 7th October 2021.