Willow Cottage Nurseries
Parents' Newsletter
Autumn 2014
www.willow-cottage.com

Here is our latest newsletter and with it some of the first signs of Autumn are appearing! Our newsletters are written to keep you informed of what is, and has been, happening at Willow Cottage.

We hope that this information will enable and encourage you as parents, carers, and supporters to work in close partnership with us and to play an effective and instrumental role in your child's education, development and happiness. In this our latest newsletter, we enclose some *important dates and news* together with information and articles that we hope you will find of interest.

Valerie and Neil Grady our founding directors say:

We continue to be committed to the delivery of the highest quality childcare (Second to Mum) and a Preschool Education of Excellence for your child. As such, we underpin this commitment by providing a highly qualified, motivated and experienced team of Early Years Teachers, Early Years Professionals and Nursery Practitioners who are all committed to giving your child the best start in life. This year we were obviously delighted to have been awarded 'outstanding' judgements for both of our nursery settings, and this recognition and accolade is a wonderful tribute to the diligence and hard work of our nursery managers, supervisors, and staffing teams and to their commitment to deliver the same. Having an outstanding status has however brought with it a new level of administration that as a small nursery business we have struggled to deal with, especially since Beryl Green (our mother and administration manager) was taken ill with a stroke in May; she continues to recover really well and thanks you all for your good wishes and prayers.

A big welcome then to a new academic year, especially to the children who have just moved up into their new departments and of course all of our new boys and girls! We hope that you all had a lovely summer. During the last month or so we have sadly said goodbye to our school leavers. It is always hard when our little ones go out into the big wide world. Most have been part of our 'extended family' since they were babies. We wish them every happiness and successful lives… *but we will miss them and we would encourage you to help them to keep in touch.*

This academic year we will be introducing a paper-less form of educational and development monitoring for your child. Called eyLog, it is a comprehensive tool aligned with the Early Years Foundation Stage (National Curriculum). The children's educational profiles will now be compiled using secure mobile devices (tablets) in and around the nursery classrooms and gardens. The more technical and practical side of eyLog will be overviewed later in this newsletter. We are obviously very excited about implementing eyLog since it will enable us all to spend more time 'hands on' with our children and less on the paperwork!

Introducing Jim

Jim (James) Grady has recently joined Willow Cottage to support Valerie and Neil (his parents) with the ever-increasing demands of the nursery sector.
Over the past few years he has been supporting us with our administration systems and when Beryl was taken ill earlier in the year it was invaluable that he was able to step up to take a more active role.

Jim brings a wealth of experience to the company and has been looking to support the directors wherever he can. He has already been able to take forward a number of new projects including updating our payroll system and introducing eyLog.

In 2000 Jim graduated with honours from Southampton University and has been a running a small company of his own for the past 10 years and is hoping to start a part-time MA in Childhood and Youth Studies at Oxford Brookes University. He would like to research how the Early Years engage with new technologies.

Diane Scarrot
BA (Hons) - Early Childhood Studies

Diane has been a very valued and hard-working member of the Willow Cottage team since November 2006 and is now the Head of Department/Team Leader of the Kindergarten department at Owls Leat, Eynsham. Diane is also our Equality and Diversity Coordinator.

Diane began her Early Years Foundation degree in September 2011 and upon gaining this degree continued her professional studies at Oxford Brookes University where this summer (2014) we are delighted to announce that she gained a BA Honours degree in Early Childhood Studies!

Diane says:

'During the last three years I have developed my knowledge of child development, looking at the theorists, for example Vygotsky and Bruner (my personal favourites), and different approaches such as Montessori. I particularly enjoyed the module which looked at inter-national early years provision and practice, focusing on the early years provision in Denmark and Reggio Emilia in Italy.

'Several of the modules provided me with opportunities to carry out research:

- I wrote an assignment exploring mark-making entitled, "What improvements in practice would ensure that both the boys and girls in our care are motivated to use writing materials?"
- I researched gender stereotypes and female under-representation in the books of our nursery lending library, which will support my role as the Equality and Diversity Coordinator.
- Finally my dissertation researched weapon play and was entitled "What guidance, regarding weapon play, would assist early years' practitioners in supporting children's development effectively and safely?"

'I have enjoyed my studies and believe they will enhance my skills and extend my knowledge, enabling me to provide for the best care and education possible for the children in the Kindergarten department. I would like to thank everyone at Willow Cottage, for their encouragement and support, with special thanks going to Ruth, Julie, Nadine and Alison for the support they provided, and also those who completed questionnaires or allowed me to observe them. Without your support this degree would not have been possible.'

Our New Bundles of Joy: mums and babies currently on maternity leave

These past few months have been very exciting for us as we have had four new babies born to staff members! We look forward to them re-joining their teams again during 2015 and wish them a wonderful maternity leave.

Anna Fraser (Nursery Practitioner at Owl's Leat Eynsham) with her beautiful son **Arthur Fraser** born 2 April 2014.

Hannah Tomkins (Senior Nursery Practitioner at Oxley's Farm, Farmoor) with her handsome and dashing son **Clark John Thorne**, born on 21 April at 11.32 weighing 6 pounds 15 ounces.

Logan Dare Keyzor – beautiful son of **Louise Mills** (Early Years Teacher at Oxley's Farm, Farmoor). Logan Dare Keyzor was born on Wednesday 18 June at 01.24am weighing 8lb 10.25oz.

Rebecca Bloomfield-Clarke (Team Leader of the Nursery department at Oxley's Farm, Farmoor) with her beautiful daughter **Penelope** who was born on 27 August weighing 6lb 15oz.

Halloween

Please note that as a Nursery School founded on Christian principles it is our policy *not* to celebrate Halloween.

Instead we will be having a look at Harvest, and doing some Fun Food activities with pumpkins and squashes, and making some delicious foods with them. Many unkind activities are carried out by older children in the name of 'Halloween'. We feel that it is inappropriate for children to be encouraged to dabble 'tongue in cheek' with things of the occult such as witchcraft and as such find it incompatible with the Christian ethos and nature of the Nursery.

Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

Ruth our Head Teacher says:

We are well in the throes of making the transition from keeping paper records to an electronic journal of each child's development. This means that you will be able to access your child's learning journey at any point, and make it easier to include your information from home.

Over the summer months a group of 'pilot' families began this journey with us and have been feeding back to us on their experiences. On the whole the feedback has been very positive, with any glitches being of a technical nature, e.g. needing to upgrade the internet access in certain areas of the settings to facilitate a better service to the tablets.

We are also working closely with eyLog, feeding back to them about the system as we are using it. They are a very reflective company and are constantly adapting and improving the system based on the feedback from their clients.

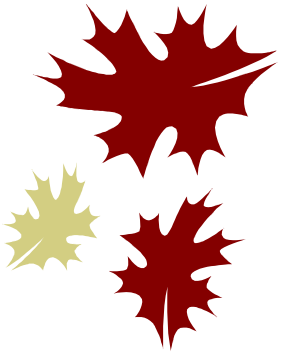
What's happening this term?

In the next week or so you will receive an email enabling you to set up your personalised pin to access your child's journal which is stored on a secure, encrypted data server. We will also write to explain further what you can expect and how to get involved.

The coming months provide plenty of opportunities for us to see changes in the environment as autumn progresses through to winter. There are also many lovely festivals that as well as providing many learning opportunities can help children to begin to develop a sense of themselves as part of a wider community.

Some of the upcoming themes and activities:

Autumn and Changes:



Exploring the autumn leaves, using them to print and paint with, count and sort by colour and size, play with in our sensory tray. Making pumpkin soup and apple muffins. Making pictures based around the seasons of the year. Playing with conkers, counting them, describing their texture, using them in sensory imaginative play. Exploring how colour changes through finger painting, experiments using coloured water and mixing different coloured play dough. Looking at how we change as we grow up using photographs or ourselves and others.

All about Me:

Thinking about the things that we can do and celebrating these. Developing skills to support independence in dressing and care skills. Identifying features and naming parts of the body – songs 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes', 'This is the way we wash our hands', 'I have ten little fingers'. Thinking about the special people in our families and the times that we share with them.

Transport:

Exploring different ways of travel and sorting into those that go on land, water or air. Role play petrol station. Making our own road signs. Playing with toy cars in paint to see what patterns we can make. Pretend car wash in the garden. Making hot air balloons using papier maché. Farm and tractor play!

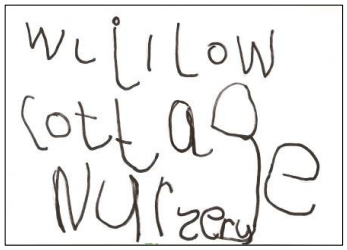
Mark-making: the importance of nurturing the 'scribbles' and 'marks'

In previous Newsletters we have published articles about how we teach our children to read and to enjoy books and the exponential advantage in life that this gives to them.

Here we would like to explain a little of how we encourage and promote their emerging writing skills and the very positive ways that you as parents can partner us and contribute to helping your child to develop this so vital and lifelong skill.

The skills involved in being able to write obviously begin to be developed long before a child even picks up a pencil. Our youngest children in the Nursery department are already developing these skills when holding rattles, picking up objects and moving them to their mouths. They are even then developing the muscles in their hands and the eye/hand co-ordination that will help them with writing another day.

As children progress through each department within Willow Cottage our teachers and trained nursery nurses provide play activities through which our children learn. These fun activities are tied in loosely with the current 'theme' (topic) and are tailored appropriately by each departmental team to cater for the individual needs of the children within their group so as to encourage and maximise the all-round development of each child…. and this includes their pre-writing skills.



Planned activities and spontaneous opportunities help each child to understand how different marks can be made and encourage children to explore mark making as a form of expression. This might be no more than stomping in puddles to make foot-prints which can be extended to making tyre tracks through the puddles, or even bouncing a wet tennis ball!

There are countless games and play activities which take place during the nursery day which help to develop the eye/hand co-ordination and understanding of movement so necessary for the development of these skills.

Threading, sorting/collecting buttons, pouring water and sand all help with the child's 'fine motor skills'. Outdoor climbing/balance equipment, group games and obstacle courses, etc. help to develop the child's gross motor skills. Even our developmental music sessions with such activities as dancing with ribbons helps here … who would have thought it?

As the children's writing skills develop they begin to draw faces, features, arms and legs etc. and progress in their 'Code Breaker' sessions to the more formal letter/sound formation we can start to see the results of the experiences gained over the preceding months and years. When we see our notice boards being adorned with children's pictures and writing our hearts leap with joy!

We know from painful experience that there are opportunities for mark making everywhere!! (sometimes in places that we would rather not!)

At Nursery, as at home, we sensitively guide their early mark-making to encourage a suitable surface like paper, chalk boards, etc. so that we do not discourage but encourage and nurture these budding literary experiences as they emerge. This way we can encourage a confident and evolving hand, as children form strong foundations for the handwriting which will develop.

Our Nursery Food Matters Campaign continues …

At Willow Cottage we continue our campaign to make healthy food matter! We prioritise both the delivery of nutritious food to our children and the fun food education that helps children to understand food and how to start to make healthy choices for themselves. These important areas of a child's nursery education underpin their physical and mental wellbeing and also can affect their educational attainment as research shows.* With childhood obesity and its related diseases now designated in the UK as a 'national emergency' we strive to take our part as early year's educators in this most specialised field.

LEADING ASPECT AWARD

All our electronic recipe books and resources are available by way of our sister website www.nurseryfood.com. They are downloadable pdf's with 'active indexes' for ease of use. All have easy to follow, time honoured and affordable recipes, helpful cooking prompts, nutritional advice and colourful photographs.

Our creative food resources, quality food delivery, dissemination of resources and educational delivery have given us the recognition and status of the National Leading Aspect Award, entitled ***Nursery Food Matters: an embedded educational philosophy.***

Mr. Willow our teddy bear chef and healthy food hero continues to helps us do this. His **'Fun Food Family Packs'** have now been developed and published as paperbacks and ebooks to make them widely available to other early year's settings, parents and child carers.

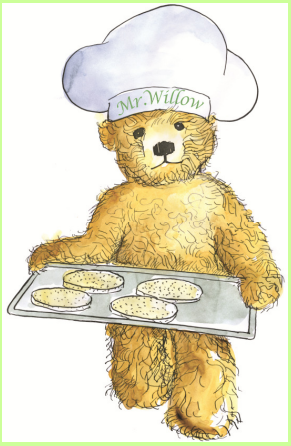
Our **children's recipes** are published as

- **Mr. Willow's ABC of Cooking with Babies and Children (Family sized)**
- **Mr. Willow's Essential Recipes for Nursery Schools**
- **Mr. Willow's ABC of Cooking with Babies and Children for Childminders.**

*Research from Bristol University: *The ALPAC (longitudinal) Study*

Janet Jackson, (Registered Dietician with Diabetes UK) who helped advise our management team in disseminating nutritional advice amongst our Nursery Practitioners and Cooks.

Mr. Willow's latest Fun Food eNewsletter is now available!



Eat well and keep fit! The September Fun Food eNewsletter is all about the nutritional value and fruit in a child's diet and especially of berries!

Mr. Willow (left) has a special low-sugar seasonable berry recipe for you and your child to make together and lots of Fun Food activities for you to try! The English blackberries are now ready … so why not keep fit and eat well at the same time! The nursery freezers are now packed full of wild local blackberries ready for the winter.

You can 'sign up' to receive our Fun Food eNewsletters each month from our website or the sister nursery food website.

Mr. Willow's Fun Food eNewsletters offer parents, family members and friends the opportunity to encourage cookery in the Early Years and to role model healthy food at home. They give step-by-step guidance and information to help you teach your child about healthy foods and there is one of Mr. Willow's special children's recipes to make with your child and lots of other suggestions and tips as to seasonal foods and fun food activities.

Mr. Willow's monthly Fun Food e-Newsletters follow the natural calendar offering seasonal recipes designed especially for a child to make with an adult. We hope that you enjoy them .... please let us know and feel free to pass them on to anyone you think might like a copy.

2014 SCORES ON THE DOORS - 5 stars all round again!

CONGRATULATIONS to Marion, Joji and Debbie our children's chefs for gaining the highest accolade for their standards of food hygiene and practice in our nursery kitchens! Both nurseries receiving 5 stars as 'Scores On The Doors!'

Well done to Ruth and Julie, Nadine and Julie B the Nursery managers and supervisors for delivering this high standard of practice!

Angela Willson from our Administration Department writes…

Angela Willson (above) from our Administration Department would like to explain a little about the 'safer recruitment' process we operate here at Willow Cottage and how this protects your child.

In our latest Ofsted inspection our recruitment procedures were judged as 'outstanding'.

We underpin our 'Second to Mum' commitment to you as parents by providing a highly qualified, motivated and experienced team of Early Years Teachers, Early Years Professionals and Nursery Practitioners who are all committed to giving your child the best start in life.

Two recent testimonials:

Willow Cottage has exceeded our expectations. Having worked in primary schools for 20 years I knew what I wanted and luckily didn't have to look far. The staff are by far the best commodity of this establishment, providing fun, creative, challenging, inspiring activities in beautiful grounds. My child's manners, language, skills and team skills have all been commented on by friends and a lot of this is due to the hard work that has been put in at Willow. I would have driven across town if it meant a place here at Willow Cottage. *Parent*

Having recently transferred to the Willow Cottage staff team, I would like to say how impressed I am in the way nursery staff are treated compared to my previous nursery employer. It clearly shows that the Management care and are dedicated to ensure an excellent working environment for their loyal employees. *Member of staff*

At Willow Cottage we believe that building effective, happy and appropriate teams for each department/age group is something worth doing really well, but it is not an easy quest and short-listing, scrutinising and sifting candidates and obtaining the relevant references necessary is onerous, to say the least! In cases where prospective staff have been trained abroad their qualifications have to be are validated by UK NARIC and police checks in their country of residence are requested also.

We believe that the result is a team of passionate, qualified and experienced practitioners dedicated to giving children the best start in life. Unfortunately, due to changes in education and Government funding, there is currently a dearth of qualified practitioners available so this gives us even more of a challenge! Oxfordshire County Council have withdrawn funding of the Foundation Degree for Early Years Education. In the past, this has enabled us to recruit some very able practitioners, who wanted to develop their professional careers but, with this funding no longer available we do not have an incentive to offer our staff to encourage career progression. If you feel you can support Willow Cottage by bringing this to the attention of your county councillor, we would be most grateful. Details of county councillors can be found on the Oxfordshire County Council website

Willow Cottage has high standards and we want to recruit the best possible team members but, from the time of placing an advertisement, to the start of employment, can take a considerable amount of time as you can understand. Please bear with us while we safely recruit replacement and additional staff.

Childcare Vouchers and Salary Sacrifice

The majority of our existing parents are receiving the advantages of using salary sacrifice to purchase childcare vouchers. This is a tax-efficient way to pay your nursery fees. If you are a new parent and would like to have the benefit of such a scheme, please contact your employer to find out about the arrangements they have in place. It is possible for both working parents to supply childcare vouchers and, depending on your tax status; this could amount to £486.00 per month. We do ask that you set-up the vouchers to be released so that the payment is received in our bank account in the first few days of the month. An invoice is raised dated the first of the month and our bookkeeper allocates the vouchers against the invoice, thus reducing the balance payable. When you receive your monthly statement, you will be able to see these transactions. New parents will be making payments by direct debit and the balance on the statement will normally be the amount we collect. Some parents may find that they can cover all of their fees with vouchers in which case no direct debit will need to be collected. If you run your own business and do not yet have a childcare voucher supplier, you can access details of the main suppliers on the internet.

Please telephone Angela Willson on 01865 864604 or email her at angela@willow-cottage.com if you require the Carer ID number for the nursery your child attends.

Please record our telephone numbers in order to keep in contact!

Good communication between us is key to offering you an effective partnership and the best possible service. Please let us know if and when:

- your child is poorly and not attending or absent for any other reason;
- you are going to be late arriving and your child requires a cooked lunch;
- you have been delayed and will be late collecting your child.

Below are the direct telephone numbers to the supervisor of the nursery setting your child attends. We are quite protective of these numbers and do not generally publish them in order that our staff are screened and therefore protected from all unnecessary and time wasting sales and marketing calls. *(The second lines are there purely as a backup in case our main numbers have a fault at any time.)*

Farmoor:	**01865 865206**	**(main line)**
	01865 861595	**(second line)**
Eynsham:	**01993 883583**	**(main line)**
	01993 357295	**(*new* second line)**

We would therefore ask you to take a moment to update your mobile phones to ensure you have the direct nursery numbers for the setting your child attends at your fingertips; and this way you also avoid the main nursery administration switchboard experience of waiting to be transferred! Thank you for your co-operation.

Please keep us informed of any changes to your family contact details.

On our secure nursery information system we hold your family details, any special needs and your contact details. In the case of an emergency, it means that we can act swiftly to contact you using your emergency telephone numbers and emails which can be accessed from the central office to help with an efficient evacuation. Providing they are updated regularly we have access to your child's dietary requirements, allergy information and any special medical conditions. If there are any changes e.g. new address, new telephone number or email then please request a "Changes to Family Information" form from the nursery office and then return to the nursery's Supervisor for updating.

Please ensure that if at any time you are not available on the numbers you have given to us you give the Nursery Supervisor an alternative number. Thank you.

Contact Details

Management Team:

Head Teacher: Ruth Salway BEd (Hons), EYPS
E-mail: ruth@willow-cottage.com
Area Manager: Julie DeBanks DPP
E-mail: julie@willow-cottage.com
Manager for Administration, Finance and Buildings:
James (Jim) Grady BSc (Hons)
Email: jim@willow-cottage.com

Administration Office (Admissions, Finance and Recruitment):

11 Hids Copse Road, Oxford OX2 9JJ
01865 864604
Email: enquiries@willow-cottage.com
Angela Willson —Admissions, Recruitment and HR
E-mail: angela@willow-cottage.com
Sara Franklin — Finance and Administration
Email: sara@willow-cottage.com

Nursery Settings:

Willow Cottage Nursery — Oxley's Farm, Cumnor Road, Farmoor OX2 9NS
Registration no. EY464145
(01865) 865206/861595
Supervisor Julie Badnell
E-mail: julieb@willow-cottage.com
Manager Ruth Salway
E-mail: ruth@willow-cottage.com

Willow Cottage Nursery — Owl's Leat, Lower Road, Eynsham OX29 4EH
Registration no. EY464144
(01993) 883583/880175
Supervisor Nadine McLaughlin
E-mail: nadine@willow-cottage.com
Manager Julie DeBanks
Email: julie@willow-cottage.com

Directors:

Neil Grady BSc (Hons)
E-mail: neil@willow-cottage.com
Valerie Grady BSc (Hons), PGCE, EYPS
E-mail: valerie@willow-cottage.com

Dates for Your Diary 2014-2015

School Photographs

Farmoor Setting: Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25 September 2014
Eynsham Setting: Monday 29 and Tuesday 30 September 2014

Christmas Concert and Nativity Celebrations

Oxley's Farm, Farmoor: Wednesday 3 December 2014 (9.45 for 10.00am).
Owl's Leat, Eynsham: Wednesday 10 December 2014 (9.45 for 10.00am).

Our Christmas Concert and Nativity will take place on the above dates for the children of the Kindergarten and Lower Kindergarten departments only.

Parents join us at the Eynsham Village Hall (Back Lane), bringing their children along with them in costume at 9.45am for our Christmas celebrations. Only the Nursery Department will be open that morning at our normal times, and the older children will join them again back at the Nursery afterwards around 12.00 pm. A cooked lunch will be served as usual, though at a slightly later time.

Closing dates – Bank Holidays 2014-15

Both nurseries will close at end of the day on Tuesday 23 December 2014 and will re-open on Friday 2 January 2015.

We will close for the Easter Bank Holidays on Thursday 2 April 2015 and re-open on Tuesday 7 April 2015.