

## Kids Friendly Advisor Report to Synod AGM 2014

It continues to be a privilege and enjoyable challenge to serve the churches of Otago Southland as the Synod Kids Friendly Advisor. The role is now into its 5<sup>th</sup> year so **how are we going in our 'kids' friendliness'?**



This is a hard question to answer with the diversity of the 73 parishes in our region. If I was to quote numbers and percentages I could say...

- 39 churches have formally joined the Kids Friendly network
- 14 churches have completed at least one Self-review in order to be recognised as a 'Kids Friendly church.' 3 yearly renewals are required so this is a journey rather than a destination of 'We've made it!'
- 195 people receive the monthly e-news alerting them to the latest resources, events and links to the website [www.kidsfriendly.org.nz](http://www.kidsfriendly.org.nz)
- 15 workshops offered for children's ministry leaders- in different regions throughout last year – some as part of the Children's Ministry Network – an encouraging cooperation of Anglican, SU, CEC and Presbyterian.)

Perhaps that sounds impressive? Perhaps not! I could also estimate that.....

- 8 churches in our region have more than 20 children on a Sunday,
- 12 have none or very rarely.
- 53 churches have between 1 and 20 children – with ages from 2 -14yrs and often irregular attendance which is challenging for preparation and resourcing.
- That's about 3.5% of total children under 15yrs in all of Otago Southland (2013 census)

Does this measure our 'kids' friendliness'? Numbers on Sunday is only a part of many churches' HEART FOR CHILDREN.

I have the privilege of meeting many wonderful people who have a heart for children and tell me stories of what is happening in their churches -beyond Sunday mornings. They are grappling with what it means to 'be church' in an increasingly secular society. In seeking God's purpose and mission, they 'look at what God is already doing and join in.' Many are discovering the importance, the joy, the FUN, the hard work and the vibrancy of connecting with community children and families in a wide variety of ways: through school connections- RE and SUPAkidz programmes, tutor reading and nit busters; weekly and holiday time kids clubs; music and movement; playgroups; parenting tools and 'Messy Church' (all age worship, active learning and a meal at an alternative time to Sunday morning.)

This is part of the changing nature of ministry with families today. Children are no longer brought or sent to Sunday school as the norm, but children and their parents still need community, a place to belong, and a place of hope. And they are very open to the gospel when it is shared in words and actions in a loving, consistent way. Did you realise that a church congregation may be the only place in our society where up to 5 generations can share together? What a gift we have to share!

Those who offer these 'outside Sunday morning ministries' also need the whole church's prayer, financial and encouraging support.

So what is your church's HEART FOR CHILDREN and how is this 'kids' friendliness' being expressed? No one size fits all. It is my privilege to walk alongside any church in the Synod area so do not hesitate to contact me. I love to hear your stories – your joys and challenges- and to offer resources and encouragement as you minister to the children and families of your church and community.

God's blessings

Cheryl Harray