

# Focus on fatherhood: Tim feels just as welcomed as any other parent at an East Reading Children's Centre



Tim and Ali Crooks live in Reading with their daughter, Jessica, who is nearly one year old.

## A logical choice

With Ali holding down a full-time job as a Deputy Head Teacher and Tim a self-employed scriptwriter on an irregular income, the logic was fairly obvious - Tim was to take on full-time care of Jessica during term-time and work from home as and when he could. Whilst Ali was on maternity leave she had taken Jessica to Groups at Hamilton Road Children's Centre so when she returned to work, Tim was happy to follow in her footsteps: "I was more than pleased to take on the role of main carer but I definitely needed to make sure I had a regular routine to follow, something to get me out of the house on a daily basis or I would have been climbing the walls! Carrying on with activities at the Centre has been one of the ways I've been able to achieve that, and a very valuable asset it has been."



**East Reading  
Children's Centres Team**

*A place we play and learn together*





## Positive reaction

Tim has made sure that there is something lined up for every day, and at least two of those days are sessions at the Centre. "We have been to Bumps and Beyond, Babes and Beyond and the Stay and Play sessions at the Health Visitor's Drop-In, where I take Jessica to be weighed and checked," he says. "Even though she is so young I can see how positively she reacts to the different stimulus, how she watches the other children and is probably learning from the people around her. As an early introduction to social interaction it has to be a very worthwhile experience."

## Breaking down barriers

Understandably, the Centre is very largely a female-dominated environment and there are times when Tim is the only male presence at the sessions. Whilst this does not at all concern him from his own perspective, he appreciates that he can be something of a novelty to the mums, and to some members of the Muslim community in particular. "Growing up in the Middle East as I did, I fully understand that I might be warily looked upon by some of the ladies," he says. "Knowing that, I am happy to keep my distance until they feel comfortable with the fact that I am there just for my daughter, just as they are for their children. I now feel we have broken down any barriers of class, culture and gender which is great; I want my daughter to appreciate

and accept the richness of cultural diversity in which she is growing up."

## A special feeling

One thing which Tim especially values about the Centre is the way that both he and Jessica are made to feel included and welcomed as individuals. "We go to quite a few other groups which we enjoy and are entertaining and stimulating for Jessica, but the staff at the Centre make me feel that bit more special," he says. "They know us by name, are interested and make time for us. I realise that I stick out like a sore thumb as one of the very few men who go to the sessions, but I know that they are the same way with everyone - they take a genuine interest in each and every parent, and that is a nice feeling."

## Accessible, inclusive and family-friendly

Tim and Ali's family circumstances are a perfect example of how valuable the resources of the Centre can be. Any full-time parent can appreciate the importance of a child-friendly environment which is easily accessible, completely inclusive and, as Tim points out, completely non-judgmental. "I do feel absolutely comfortable there," he says. "No-one makes me feel under any pressure to do or be anything other than myself. I never get that 'Monday Morning Feeling' because I have something familiar and positive to look forward to at the start of the week. That has got to be good for me, and for my daughter, too."



## For further information contact your local Children's Centre:

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