

## CASE STUDY

### ST JOHN THE BAPTIST CHURCH, PENZANCE, DIOCESE OF TRURO, COFE

[www.penlecluster.org.uk/young-people-and-families/playzonepenzance.php](http://www.penlecluster.org.uk/young-people-and-families/playzonepenzance.php)

Population: 21,200 (2011 Census)

Playzone@Penzance is a soft play area for children installed at the back of St John the Baptist Church, Grade II, in Penzance. The 2017 winner of the Marsh Awards for Innovative Church Projects 2017, it's open every day and provides a safe and fun space for the community's children.

The awards, run jointly by the National Churches Trust and the Marsh Christian Trust, look for: *'projects that deliver a clear benefit to the wider community, show best practice in management and sustainability, serve marginalised communities and demonstrate a real understanding of local needs'*.

Parts of Penzance have the highest levels of deprivation in Cornwall and even in Europe – and there were few safe indoor spaces for children to play. Consultations at community events and with local schools gave the community a chance to decide what facilities they wanted. And so in 2015 – after a crowdfunding effort in which £2,202 was raised within 28 days - the church removed half its pews and moved the font to make space for the playzone, which local children helped to design.

The total cost of the project was £30,000, but they managed to find the remainder from charities that fund work which benefits young families. The crowdfunding exercise got publicity and illustrated the keen support from the local community. The project breaks even, but they continue to raise funds so that they can offer free sessions to families in need and school “well done” prizes!

The Revd Sian Yates says: *'it was important to involve local people right from the start. A local school helped with the design. Tiger Play were superb and working directly with the young people about designs and a lot of the artwork was created at holiday clubs'*.

It's a win- win for the community and the church as with the heating on for four hours a day the building 'feels loved' and the damp smell has gone. And with the help of volunteers it's now open seven days a week and has become a safe space for all - including vulnerable families. The venue also provides much-needed employment, plus work experience for a rota of volunteers.

And a group called Coachhouse, which provides accommodation for vulnerable young people, sells low-priced cakes and lunchboxes.

There are playzone sessions each week for children to unwind after school, and a session targeted at fathers on Saturday mornings and when the public sessions are closed, local schools use the facilities.

With its new layout, the church can be much more flexible and is now used for parties and other meetings. The local breastfeeding group; Aspire, which works with children in need and Alcoholics Anonymous all meet in the church and work is being done with a women's refuge as well.

The judges of the award liked the: *'exceptional involvement with parents and children, especially the contribution of local children in designing the equipment. Impact is high in this community, which has high levels of deprivation. The project is contributing significantly to the use, engagement and condition of the building'*.