

Chairman's Report

2025 / 2026

Welcome everyone and thank you for attending this year's Friends of Crockerne AGM.

As always, this is our formal meeting where we take a moment to look back at the year, present the Chair's and Treasurer's reports and appoint the committee who will take Friends of Crockerne forward.

This year, however, feels a little different for me.

After six years as Chair of Friends of Crockerne, this is my final Chairman's Report.

I have written these reports every year and normally sit down with a fairly clear idea of what I want to say. This one has been much harder.

How do you condense six years of people, events, friendships, fundraising, ridiculous ideas, laughter, worry, achievements, children growing up and an enormous amount of love for one little school into a few pages?

One final year

This year Friends of Crockerne raised an incredible amount of money supporting the children of Crockerne, as outlined in the Treasurers report.

Those figures are something we should be enormously proud of. This year we made a very conscious decision that our success wouldn't simply be measured by how much money we could raise. After several years of focusing on large projects and improvements around the school, we wanted to concentrate more on experiences. The moments children remember.

We welcomed **Steel from Gladiators** into school for a completely free visit for every pupil, delivering an inspiring assembly about exercise, hydration, healthy habits and looking after both body and mind. The excitement around the school was brilliant and it was one of those occasions when learning and inspiration came wrapped up in something the children thought was simply incredibly cool.

For World Book Day we transformed Charlie and the Chocolate Factory into our very own Wonka experience, complete with characters and our now legendary **Cronka Bars**. It was bonkers, colourful and great fun – with every single member of staff getting involved. It was a sterling effort from all.

We also **fully funded two theatre trips, including transport**, at absolutely no cost to parents. KS1 visited the Redgrave Theatre and KS2 visited Bristol Old Vic. For some children it was their first experience of live theatre and, incredibly, for some it was their first time leaving the village. One child was apparently completely in awe simply crossing the Clifton Suspension Bridge. That little story has stayed with me. Sometimes we can get caught up in fundraising and how much an event has made, but that is why Friends exists. For one child, a coach journey across a bridge became a memory.

We continued the events the children love - **Break the Rules Day, Silent Disco and our Colour Run** - and once again filled the school with noise, laughter and just the right amount of chaos.

One last Circus

It somehow felt appropriate that my final major event should be Happy's Circus after initially booking it 6 years ago, just before Covid hit so it didn't happen. Seeing families coming together under that Big Top, children excited, volunteers running around, food being served, drinks being poured and our wider community turning out to support Crockerne reminded me of everything I have loved about Friends. I'm absolutely thrilled to confirm that our final profit from the Circus was: **£2730**. Huge thanks to **Laura Antolic** for her match funding contributions.

Every ticket bought, every shift volunteered, every burger served and every person who helped set up and clear away contributed to that figure. But once again, for me, the figure isn't really the best bit. The best bit was looking around and seeing our community together. That has always been the magic.

Six years of Friends

I became Chair in 2020. What a time to volunteer for the job. Life as we knew it had stopped. Schools had closed, families were struggling, physical events disappeared overnight and I remember questioning whether trying to raise money during such an awful period was even appropriate. And yet, underneath all of that uncertainty, the reason Friends existed hadn't changed. Our children still deserved a safe, happy, creative and exciting place to grow. So, we adapted. We held virtual events, Christmas tabletop stalls in the precinct, Sssshhh Santa surprises, Smartie Challenges, Crazy Hair Days, Bags2School collections and whatever else we could dream up within the rules at the time. And somehow, in that first extraordinary year, we raised **over £10,000**.

More importantly, I learned something about Crockerne that would shape the next six years for me. When things get difficult, this community shows up. As life gradually returned to normal, so did we.

We held our first smaller Circus. We developed the school grounds. We created growing areas where children could sow and grow, installed the historical timeline, built the 10-metre climbing wall and created colourful wall art and creative play areas from Platform 9 ¾ to Narnia.

We created sandpits and mud kitchens. We painted benches. We built sheds and raised planters in the rain. We held DIY SOS days. We organised discos, movie nights, Christmas events, Easter hunts, Bags2School collections, Hot Chocolate Fridays, ice cream sales, Race Nights, Silent Discos, Topsy Tea and Pillgo Bingo, Break the Rules Days, Colour Runs and probably our most popular event, our incredible Christmas raffle led by our brilliant **Lou**, who has transformed this over the years to be a huge fundraiser for us. Her efforts are really quite something.

We watched children swinging in hammocks, playing in mud kitchens, reading in bell tents, toasting marshmallows around the firepit and laughing until their sides hurt. We funded equipment, laptops, computers, books, sports resources, science resources, life skills and Year 6 celebrations.

We built a website, introduced card machines and improved the way Friends communicated with families.

Then we started looking beyond the school gates. We wrote letters. Lots of letters. We walked around the village and surrounding areas and contacted businesses because we were determined that a lack of education funding was not going to mean Crockerne children missed out. That campaign helped the school's GoFundMe reach around **£7,000** and, perhaps even more importantly, began relationships with businesses and organisations that would go on to make an enormous difference to Crockerne.

Our wonderful **Friends of Friends** grew. Local companies gave money, materials, resources and something equally valuable - their time. Those relationships helped us achieve things that, several years earlier, would have felt completely out of reach.

The playground

For years we talked about the KS1 playground. We planned it. We wished for it. We tried to find ways of funding it. Eventually, through an extraordinary combination of grant bid writing, fundraising, community support, business relationships, volunteers and sheer determination, that tired grey concrete space became something completely different. A colourful, exciting, inclusive playground for our children. And somehow, our little Crockerne even ended up on **BBC Points West**. I remember looking around at what had been created and having a real pinch me moment, we actually did it. Not me. We. Absolutely none of this has ever been the achievement of one person. Not ever.

Across these six years, Friends of Crockerne has raised **well over £80,000**, all ultimately directed back towards our school and our children through projects, opportunities and experiences. That number is extraordinary. I hope though, when people look back at these years, they don't remember the number. I hope they remember what it created.

The people behind Friends

Although I have had the title of Chair, I have never stood here alone. Not once. There have been some truly formidable women standing alongside me over these six years.

To my current team - **Lou, Vicki, Charlene and Kat** - thank you doesn't even come close.

Thank you for being the calm in the chaos, for listening when I've said, "I've had an idea...", and for simply rolling your sleeves up and helping me make them happen. For the messages, planning, carrying, shifting, selling, organising, problem-solving, coffee, wine, laughing and occasionally wondering why on earth we agreed to any of this - thank you.

And to those who have shared different parts of this six-year journey with me – **Sian B, Poppy C, Abi M, Caja P, Belle F, Wendy M, Ellie B, Ruth C, Mrs Chivers** and the many other committee members and regular volunteers who have given their time over the years - you have each left your mark on Friends. An extra special thanks must go to **Caroline B** who spent weeks sewing the 40 long drop pieces of white fabric to create our Christmas wall covering transformation in the large hall. Another daft idea of mine. I'll never forget that first day we put them up. It was a really special moment.

There is one person who deserves a very special mention.

Sonya Crutchley. Sonya has been the bridge between Friends and the school for so many years. She has been our sounding board, organiser, fixer, supporter, source of honesty and occasionally the person who has helped turn one of our slightly ambitious ideas into something the school could actually accommodate. Quite simply, Friends would not have been the same without you. Thank you so very much.

I also want to acknowledge **Mrs Emma Bray.**

Emma's belief in Friends allowed us to think bigger. She gave us the freedom to be creative, supported our ideas and understood that what we were trying to achieve was never simply about fundraising. Her warmth, ambition and commitment to the children made our partnership with school incredibly special.

To the school team, our head and deputy Mrs Rees and Mrs White, the office teams over the years, our Governors, finance staff who have saved us thousands in VAT, teaching staff, support staff and everyone who has tolerated me appearing with another question, request, box, poster, raffle prize or slightly questionable plan - thank you.

To every business that sponsored us, donated to us or gave us volunteers; to every resident who responded to one of our letters; and to everyone who became a Friend of Friends - thank you.

To every parent, grandparent and carer who baked, donated, bought tickets, volunteered for an hour, stood behind a stall, carried tables, cleared up, sold raffle tickets, shifted equipment, dressed up, got covered in paint or simply turned up and supported an event, Thank you.

And finally, there is somebody who has never technically applied to join Friends but has somehow served a six-year sentence anyway. My poor husband **Phil**. Over the years I have repeatedly gone home and uttered the dangerous words, "I have an idea..." and somehow Phil's response has always been, "I can do that."

He has built things, fixed things, moved things, collected things and been drafted in for his skills ultimately saving Friends an enormous amount of money along the way.

Thank you for never quite knowing what you were going to come home to and for supporting me through all of it. I genuinely couldn't have done it without you.

And now the difficult bit.

Six years ago, I became Chair of Friends of Crockerne. I thought I was volunteering to help raise some money for my daughter's school. I had absolutely no idea what I was actually signing up for. I didn't know it would give me friendships I will carry long after I leave these gates.

I didn't know how many evenings would be spent planning, how many messages would be sent, how many tables we would carry, how many spreadsheets I'd create or how many completely ridiculous ideas we'd somehow turn into reality.

I didn't know there would be Circuses, snow machines, Silent Discos, playground transformations, Cronka Bars, Colour Runs, television cameras, marshmallows, muddy shoes, late nights, early mornings, laughter and probably a

few tears. And I certainly didn't know how fiercely I would come to care about making sure every child who walked through the gates of Crockerne had the opportunities they deserved.

But most of all, I didn't realise how quickly six years would pass. When I started this journey, Freya was still a little girl. Crockerne life seemed as though it would go on forever. Then somewhere amongst the numerous WhatsApps and endless planning, my little girl grew up!

She became one of those Year 6 children I had watched leave every summer. Her time had come to walk through those gates for the last time herself. I knew my time was fast approaching. Writing these words is far harder than I thought it would be, because Crockerne has been part of our family life for so long.

This school has never been the newest or the shiniest. We haven't always had the latest technology, the newest buildings or an endless pot of money. I've written variations of that sentence in these reports for years. But I've also always followed it with the same sentiment. Look at what we do have.

We have heart and people who care. We have teachers and staff who see the child before the statistic. We have parents who show up and give their immense support and are genuinely grateful for the opportunities we are delivering for their children.

We have a village and community that, when asked, will move mountains with us, and we have children who deserve absolutely everything we can possibly give them.

That is wealth. That is what makes Crockerne special, and that is why I have always been so incredibly proud to say that my daughter is a **Crockerne Kid**.

There were times when we didn't have enough volunteers and times when the weather didn't cooperate. There were times when life outside Friends was difficult, never more so than when I lost both my Mum and my Mum in law within 6 months of each other. The committee rallied and held me and continued the amazing work we'd been doing so the kids wouldn't miss out.

There would always be a moment. A child seeing live theatre for the first time. Crossing the Clifton Suspension Bridge and staring out of the coach window in amazement. A little one swinging in a hammock because they don't have a garden. Children singing at the top of their voice at a Silent Disco because no one could hear them, except for us of course. Hundreds of children covered head to toe in colour, laughing proper belly laughs. Or simply a child running across a playground shouting: "This is the best day ever!"

Suddenly it all made sense, because those are the things I will remember. Not the spreadsheets or the bank balance. Not how much we made on a raffle. Those moments.

Time for the next chapter

Walking away from something you love is incredibly bittersweet and I just love this school and everything it stands for. Whilst I will be staying on the committee in a silent capacity in order to see the transformation of the long awaited Pool project, it is time to step away from every day Crockerne life and fundraising.

Friends needs new people, new energy and new ridiculous ideas, and I genuinely believe this next team will take what has been built and make it even better. I hope you change things, I hope you try things we never thought of, and I hope you continue to laugh. A lot. I hope that, amongst all the organisation and fundraising, you occasionally stop and look around, because one day, far sooner than you imagine, your children will have grown up too, and you'll realise those chaotic days were actually some of the very best ones.

So, I'm not leaving Friends feeling sad about what I'm giving up, I'm leaving enormously grateful for what it gave me. Friendships, laughter, stress, chaos, tired feet, muddy playgrounds and more late-night messages than I could ever count. It gave me some of the proudest moments I've had as a parent. It gave me a purpose.

Above everything else, it gave me the enormous privilege of playing a very small part in the childhoods of hundreds of Crockerne children.

There is one belief that has sat underneath almost everything I have tried to do as Chair.

I wrote it last year and I believe it now more than ever that every single child at Crockerne deserves magic. Not because of where they live, or what their parents can afford, or because of a school budget, simply because they are children.

If, Friends of Crockerne has managed to put a little more magic into their childhoods, then every meeting, late night, fundraiser, frantic event set-up has been worth it.

It has been an absolute privilege to serve as Chair. It has been an honour to work alongside all of you beautiful, incredible ladies and it has meant more to me than I will probably ever be able to properly put into words.

So, for the very last time as Chair of Friends of Crockerne...

Thank you for trusting me. Thank you for helping us give our children memories that I hope will stay with them long after they leave these gates.

And thank you, Crockerne, for allowing me to be part of your story.

With an enormous amount of love, gratitude

Charlotte Kaszubski

Chair, Friends of Crockerne PTA
2020-2026