Alva Baby and Toddlers - rebuilding community, one conversation at a time

It began with a conversation in the playground - the kind of moment that could easily have passed by in the rush of a busy school morning. A parent, Dawn, caught Mrs Currie's eye and asked whether she might have time for "a wee chat" later in the week. At first, she thought she would check her diary and arrange a call. But something made her pause. Instead of putting it off, she invited Dawn inside there and then. They sat together for a while, and Dawn shared the struggles she and other families were facing.

Looking back, she describes it as a "sliding doors moment". If she had waited, the conversation might never have happened. From that one exchange came a chain of connections that led first to Katy Sinclair (Family Support Worker), then to wider conversations about what families in Alva needed, and eventually to the idea of creating a baby and toddlers group rooted in the local community.

Samantha Currie is Principal Teacher of Children and Families at Alva Primary School. Her role is built around listening to families, understanding the barriers they face, and helping to create the right support around them. Through those conversations, she became increasingly aware that many parents were feeling isolated. Since COVID, she had noticed families who wanted to connect but were held back by anxiety, low confidence or simply the lack of a first step back into community life.

The gap was particularly clear for families with babies and young children. Years earlier, Alva had a busy toddlers group. Parents met there, babies grew up alongside one another, friendships formed, and by the time children reached nursery or school, families already knew familiar faces in the playground. She felt that this early link had been lost. Many nursery parents were no longer meeting naturally, and children were arriving less prepared for group settings, social routines and new experiences.

Her concern was not only for children, but for the adults around them. She could see how the isolation of prolonged periods away from community life had intensified anxiety for some families. In her view, some parents who had previously managed to mask their worries had found, through these times of retreat, a sort of sanctuary that allowed them to pull back from the world. For some, coming back into groups, playground conversations, and community spaces has been much harder than people realise. The new group is intended to offer a gentle way back in.

To test whether others felt the same need, Mrs Currie sent a Google form to local families. The response was overwhelming: parents said they would love a group like this. Some also offered to help. Among those who stepped forward were Hayley Keir and Andrea Bruce, alongside other parents and carers who understood the importance of creating a welcoming space. One grandmother, who is a full-time carer for her grandchild, spoke about how different it felt to be parenting again later in life without the peer network she had once known. Another parent, newly moved into the community with a baby, also recognised the need for somewhere families could belong.

The timing was tight. Through Lindsay Graham and Christine Patterson from the Child Wellbeing Partnership, Mrs Currie learned about the Make It Happen Fund - but the deadline was that same evening. She contacted parents, brought people together, and helped them shape an application in a matter of hours. The effort paid off. The group was accepted for support from the Make It Happen Fund, which is designed to put decision-making and resources closer to communities and the people who know what matters in their own lives.

That funding will help give Alva Baby and Toddlers a strong start. It can help with practical set-up costs such as insurance, storage, toys, volunteer training, first aid and food hygiene. The Child Wellbeing Partnership is also supporting the work over the summer, helping with the red tape that can so often slow community ideas down. She sees the partnership as vital: it offers encouragement, practical help and a wider belief that families and communities should be trusted to shape the support they need.

The group will begin in the community library space attached to Alva Primary School. Although it is part of the school building, families can enter without going through the school itself, making it feel more like a community hub. At first, the group will be small, with numbers capped so that parents who are anxious are not overwhelmed. The purpose is simple and clearly focused: children will have space to play, and adults will have space to sit, talk and rebuild confidence.

Over time, Mrs Currie hopes the group will grow into much more than a play session. She imagines Bookbug visits, movement and regulation activities such as Resilient Rhythms, sensory sacks, story sacks, school nurse input, health visitors, dental health support and Childsmile. These are the kinds of experiences that help children become ready for nursery and school, while also giving parents practical strategies they can use at home.

A key part of the vision is the link with Alva Academy. She contacted the academy because of its childcare course, and the response was positive. Students will have the chance to gain real experience with babies and toddlers, while the group benefits from their enthusiasm and developing skills. One academy student, Taylor Webster, supported the funding event and bravely spoke alongside Mrs Currie. Her involvement showed how the group can connect generations: babies, parents, carers, primary school staff and secondary pupils all learning from one another.

The hope for the future is that Alva Baby and Toddlers becomes a confident, community-led group with its own name, identity, volunteers and fundraising. Mrs Currie is happy to oversee it at the beginning, linking families with the school, the academy and wider services, but her longer-term hope is that parents and carers take ownership. She wants it to become a “wee well-oiled machine” that belongs to the community.

More than anything, the story shows how change can begin when someone listens at the right moment. A playground conversation became a group, a funding application, a partnership and a new source of support for families. For Samantha Currie, that matters because schools are not only places of learning. They can be the heart of a community -

places where people come together, rebuild trust, share worries, celebrate small steps and help children flourish from the very beginning.