

Dads Rock – One year on

✘ Dads Rock celebrated their first birthday last weekend.

The name 'Dads Rock' may conjure up various images, including pink candy, but according to David Marshall it is the perfect term for the only children's playgroups aimed at fathers. The name he says is a take on the Queen song 'We Will Rock You', as well as the fact that he believes dads are the rock of any family.

Fostering the creative expression of children through music (especially rock) the toddlers' group was set up by Marshall along with his friend, Thomas Lynch, and the group celebrated its first anniversary on 23 February 2013 at The Whale Arts Centre, Wester Hailes.

David said:- "I am over the moon at our success. We didn't believe we'd be here for a year, never mind have two groups!"

Dads Rock is going from strength to strength with plans for other centres underway, including one in Glasgow.

The event on Saturday, complete with all the noise of small children running about, incorporated a film montage of some of the toddlers at the group, a birthday cake the size of a giant watermelon, and the centrepiece of a shiny new bright red electric guitar donated for the party by the instrument retailer Guitar, Guitar, Corstorphine Road, of which Thomas and David were particularly proud.

✘ The evening also included a photographic exhibition of some of the fathers and children who use the group. This was previously exhibited at the Scottish Parliament, which says Thomas, are enthusiastic supporters due to research into fatherhood:- "Parliament are quite keen to give funding as it's one of their strategies to give funding to dads." He added:- "MSPs have also been supporters, for instance local MSP

Gordon McDonald is on our board of trustees. The group is also funded by the National Lottery, and is aiming for charitable status. All this means that we can provide our services free of charge. Once you start charging you're changing the culture."

Thomas added:- "We are capturing dads who work, as they don't get much time with their children, but we really have a mix of people...lots of Polish parents coming, as well as local dads'.

One of the Polish dads attending was Filip Stephen, with daughter Tessia, who is an old friend of the organisers. The group's importance for him is being able to spend quality time with his three year old. He said:- "We bonded better than before. It has improved the daughter-father relationship...because I'm a working father it's only us for a few hours."

Other positive factors for him are the friendship networks with other dads, as he said:- "I'm not an Edinburgh-born person, so this allows me to talk about children and how we deal with them and the issues involved." This is important for him as the prevalence of the usual 'mummy groups' meant that he 'felt isolated as a guy'.

✘ This was a an issue Thomas and David aimed to address. They started the group with this in mind:- "We didn't know a place for dads to go because some playgroups are full of mothers and that can be a bit intimidating for dads. Here dads come and talk about being dads...and get the space to do that."

As to the children, Filip says his daughter has flourished, overcoming her shyness of strangers:- "Here she is always singing and playing instruments, and expressing herself, and coming here leaves lots of room for mum."

Thomas agrees with this:- "We sell it to mum as a break for them, and mums are really great supporters."

One of those mothers is Sandra Thomson, mother to Riley Keogh who is 2. She said:-“The group means I get time in the mornings ...to relax. It enables my husband David to have an opportunity to bond with our son, which a father has to work at in a different way to mum, through time spent together. I feel it has given both father and son increased confidence, and seeing them content together has in turn given me confidence. Dads Rock is a good influence in our lives.”

Dads Rock Groups are located at:

The Prentice Centre, Granton Mains Avenue, EH4 4GA

Gate 55, Sighthill Road, Edinburgh EH11 4PB

Time: Saturday mornings, 10-11.30am. Suitable for 0-5 years of age.

More information can be found on the [Dads Rock Facebook page](#)