

HESTERS WAY Neighbourhood Project

run by local people for local people



MEMBERSHIP NEWS - JULY 2008

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A Founding Member of the Hesters Way Partnership

Welcome to Membership News!

A new quarterly newsletter from the Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project to keep Members of the Hesters Way Partnership up to date with all that is going on within and through the Project as we continue to give our best to support and empower local people, community groups and businesses.

This is a bumper first edition with lots of information and good news so do persevere and read as much as you can, and let us know what you think of our work.

We hope to encourage local voluntary community groups to actively promote their work through the Partnership in the months ahead with plans for some to attend regular Partnership meetings. A number of such groups are working with us to create a new web site dedicated to local voluntary and community groups, the launch date for which will be announced at our AGM in September.

We are a £550K operation employing a Team of 3.75 Staff and almost 40 Volunteers who provide frontline customer services to a projected annual footfall of 40,000 visitors to the Hesters Way and Springbank Community Resource Centres, and our Neighbourhood Shop.



We facilities manage the Centre's under contract to the Partnership. These £5.1M assets are home to 25 niche organisations, including charitable, statutory and private businesses.

The Shop is run entirely by local volunteers and won an award recently in recognition of all its good work, locally and internationally through its links with communities in Africa. The Gloucestershire Echo led awards ceremony sponsored by local businesses was held at the Centaur last month. Many local businesses and organisations were represented and, most importantly, volunteers and voluntary groups from across the area.

As you can imagine, we are delighted to tell you we have full tenancy at both Centres. This represents a total rental income of approximately £160K, requiring management of over 30 specialist service contracts worth £80k, hundreds of room hire bookings per year valued at over £50K, and demanding "on the ball" health, safety, risk management, and responsive customer service to a wide ranging client base.

We are becoming a very well run voluntary and community organisation, believed to be the only true and active VCO

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Member of the Partnership, and with the on-going commitment of the Partnership will become one of the best run charities in the county.

In addition to a growing expertise in facilities management and contract negotiation, the Project provides a variety of services to people living and working across the area. These include training courses such as IT, Numeracy, Literacy, Teaching Assistant and Communication Skills, sign posting to other

providers, debt management, advocacy work, "active community projects" such as play rangers for 8 to 16 year olds and, not least of all, volunteering placements that always give people a new lease of life!



Back to our profitable "Neighbourhood Shop" where we sell second hand clothes, furniture and bric-a-brac, we are near to opening a second shop as we focus on becoming financially independent of local government funding within the next 3 years. This goal has the full support of Cheltenham Borough Council and is an underpinning objective of the Community Investment Grant secured by the Project under the management of the Partnership.

In the run up to becoming the management agents for the Springbank Community Resource Centre on 1st February 2008, we gave 50+ hours per week of support work over a four month period to the Partnership to help run the Centre. This equates to approximately £8,000 in benefit in kind working as a Member of the Partnership

A Team of 10 Volunteers has been established to help run the Centre and support the work of the Partnerships' inspired Community Involvement Worker. We enjoy similar volunteering successes at the Hesters Way Community Resource Centre and, as already mentioned, in our Neighbourhood Shop.

All together, the monetary value of the benefit in kind to the area through HWNP's Volunteering Scheme is in excess of £100K per annum. Yet, its' true value in terms of giving opportunities for people to contribute, increase self-esteem, learn new skills, brush up on old skills, meet new friends, make a fresh start, making steps toward employment and creating local ownership is priceless, and all help to build true community.

Team building processes take time and these have been a major focus of HWNP's over the last 9 months, especially at Springbank with all the issues relating to anti-social behaviour and the work involved as a consequence with parents, police and other agencies. This has not been



A Cheltenham Borough Council meeting for older people held at Springbank Resource Centre



A weekly indoor bowls session at Springbank

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easy for some staff, volunteers, tenants and users of the Centre. The good news is though that the support measures put in place are all helping to build quality relationships with more local people as we seek to dealing with issues in a timely manner and face-to-face with understanding, respect and co-operation, and specialist training for volunteers and staff. Some further good news is that we are in the embryonic stages of creating a low profile anti-social behaviour empowerment project with the help of local parents.

We have expanded our community involvement work across the area over the last 12 months through the creation, sponsorship and mentoring of the Cheltenham West Timebank VCO. Their Newsletter will tell you that this service is benefiting members in all sorts of ways, and includes a healthy contribution from students of Pates School and growing links with local care homes.

Cheltenham West Timebank is also proving to be a great success in terms of gathering intelligence on local issues. It has been instrumental in securing a 2-year Contact from Gloucestershire First for a Rowanfield based Community Involvement Worker to involve and empower local residents. The contract was bid under the banner of Cheltenham West Consortium and was won with the valuable help of the Partnership and one of our very able volunteers.



Volunteer receptionist and Timebank member, Rebecca Lewis

We hope to be setting up and helping to run a local meeting point for young and old people in Rowanfield. It will have internet access and use of a number of computers supplied by the Partnership via an abandoned Learning Skills Council funded project. Discussions have begun with Gloucestershire Youth and Young Gloucestershire to create a new youth provision at the new meeting point in response to local people identifying this as a priority need for the area. Joint working has begun with the local Children's Centre and we welcome additional partners to support this work, especially Cheltenham Borough Homes.

A commitment from GCC's Adult Education Team has been secured to fund at least 6 courses for the start of the new academic year in September 2008, and joint working with Gloucestershire College will see at least another 4 courses being put on for students, new and

old. This is really great news! And, to put some icing on the cake, our development work of a business based "Foundation Training Course" for all our staff and volunteers is starting to take root with a second initiative being launched with Gloucestershire College in September.

Back once again to our Neighbourhood Shop in Hesters Way Road. It is to receive a £5000 face-lift and introduction of internet access and information point with money donated by Cheltenham's Round Table. It would be great to hear from Partners who can give additional support for this facelift project, so do contact us if you would like to join in the fun! Our second Neighbourhood Shop will open in September at the Hester's Way Community Resource Centre, and funding is to be sought for the fitting a mezzanine first floor to become home to the start of a "made local" cottage industry that will release the talents of local people and build up prestige across the area. Again, do contact us if you would like to be involved in this project.

On the business development front, we are near to implementing a new accounting system "SAGE Version 12" into the organisation. The benefits of which will be widespread, not least in terms of full cost centre management, cash flow and

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Under the parasol at Springbank

budgeting preparation, the opportunity to contract manage the finances of other organisations and the all important production of information for marketing purposes.

Going back to our expanding community involvement work, we are nearing the final negotiations of becoming an administrative and outreach hub for the POPPS Projects. The aim of the "Partnership for Older People's Project" is to link up with all the care homes in the area to actively include older people in community life. This is a new initiative for the area and will be great news for everyone involved. Also, building upon the success of last year's business challenge and volunteering work, we are linking up once again with Pates and Bournside Schools from September to work on a number of active community projects. We still await openings to partner up with Kingsmead School and Christ College on community projects.

So, if anyone from these schools is reading this newsletter, if you have anything you think we can help with then we would love to hear from you. Meantime, you will know we continue to provide valuable work experience placements for some of your students.

We have very recently launched a new web site which can be found at www.hwnp.org. The design of this site was by BubbleNut, a Cheltenham based web design company who assist their clients to identify their target market and then develop an online marketing strategy to ensure our business is known to all their potential customers on the Internet. The pages that you are now able to view on line make up the first phase of a three stage process of our web development. The next stage will automate the room bookings system. The site is interactive, inviting feedback and giving links to our partners' sites.



We hope you agree that we are a committed, able and highly active voluntary community organisation, and you recognise that whilst we continue to be tenacious in upholding the independence of this resident led self help organisation, we also go about our work with humility and honesty. We recognise we are a minnow in the big pool of community regeneration organisations around the Partnership Table yet hope our presence is welcomed and will remain so for many years to come.

In closing, we would like to mention that all of the above "project work", "neighbourhood management", "volunteer management" and "organisational development" has gone unpaid since 1st April 2008 as we work with Officers of Hesters Way Partnership and Cheltenham Borough Council through a transition period of the new Community Investment Grant. We have continued to invest our time, effort and belief in what we do and hope this will be rewarded soon enough through the approval of our wide and varied joint working schemes.

If you have read this newsletter to the end, then may we say "thank you". We hope you have found it informative and inspiring. If you are interested in finding out more about our work then why not come along to some of our 2nd phase business planning sessions in October and November. These sessions will involve many local residents, users of our services, existing funders and, hopefully, one or two new faces! Dates to be announced in September.