

The Oasis Centre, St Columb

The Oasis Centre is located at St Columb, central Cornwall which is an old Cornish market town. In recent years there has been development of 4,000 new homes which has been felt by some to divide the town. The older central part of the town, which is more deprived, has seen shops shut including banks closing with the remaining bank only open two half days per week. There is only one small supermarket available. Pat Walton and Pauline Turner, co-founders of the Oasis Centre, felt that the Oasis Centre project in part has provided community cohesion for the town which was not present before.

Who is the Oasis Centre for?

The Centre is for individuals who are vulnerable or housebound, including those who are isolated, infirm, disabled or elderly. It also provides a service to people with moderate to mild mental health issues; people suffering with dementia as well as those who support them; people who are unemployed and those who are bereaved.

What does the Oasis Centre do?

It runs groups and provides services for the vulnerable. The busiest group is The Wellbeing Cafe: a weekly drop in centre for anyone, providing the opportunity to chat, have a hot drink, take part in arts and crafts, play table games, read the papers etc. The Wellbeing Cafe organises monthly mini-coach outings to favourite local places. The Centre also offers an independent Foodbank opening every Saturday mornings, a Memory cafe and a CAB monthly surgery to assist with debt and financial problems.

How did the centre get to where it is today?

In 2009 the parishioners in the St Mawgan Parish felt that there was a need to develop a pastoral care team particularly as there was an elderly population in the locality. A small local training scheme was set up to undertake this development, which ran alongside some pastoral care training provided by the Diocese.

The vicar at this time was asked to take on an extra parish in the area, and in an attempt for him and his wife not to have the busy parish office in their home at the rectory, they looked around for premises in St Columb and found office space in the main street of the town.

The seeds of the Oasis Centre were sown from this office which took on the lease of the building, and subsequently also rented the office space to the cluster administrator at intervals during the week. Pat and Pauline were not sure which direction their social action should take so they made contact with the Diocesan Social Responsibility Officer (SRO) for advice, and subsequently they applied for funding from CUF which was awarded for new flooring surfaces for the building.

Pat and Pauline had further meetings with the SRO and a colleague (a vicar's wife), Sue Dickenson, from another part of the county who already had in place several projects in her parish. Sue was a real inspiration to them and said 'come and talk to me and take what ideas you want'. From that point onwards this group continued to meet every 3 months and talked about development in the community and they started to get a foundation on what to build.



Anne Walker, Pauline Turner & Pat Walton

From the Oasis office window on the main street it was apparent that there were some vulnerable people in the community. Some of them had no focus place in the community and would wander around the town. On questioning some of the individuals they said that they would like a warm place to meet in, a hot drink and

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some company, and Pauline remembered that one individual said he wanted a place where someone would ‘know my name’.

Anne Walker, Church Warden, started a Drop in Centre at the Columba Centre next to the church. Unfortunately after a while this had to be stopped owing to health and safety reasons. However, after a major refurbishment, a coffee morning was organised. On the first occasion 12-18 people attended which was quite a surprise. These began to be regular weekly coffee mornings which subsequently came to become the beginnings of the Oasis Centre starting with the Wellbeing Café.

About the Wellbeing Café and other groups

The Wellbeing Café has always focussed on what the users would like to do. Suggestions were made to have newspapers and table top games. An art teacher who had recently suffered with ill health just popped into the café and offered to run an art group and continued to do so until May this year. There is now a trainee art therapist taking on a similar role. A user with apparent unknown creative skills until coming to the Centre, started amazing craft activities. A Memory Café started on alternate weeks on Tuesday afternoons, which now runs weekly on Thursday afternoons. Cornwall Community Foundation approached the Centre to start a luncheon club which would be supported by them. This was started on Thursdays between the café and memory clinic. Thus providing a whole day of community activities and food for the users.



Presently there are 36 users of the Wellbeing café and have had to move into the larger hall. There is a team of volunteers to support the café. Some of the volunteers may have needs themselves and have been seen to flourish in their volunteer role at the Centre.

Funding

There have had some very generous donations for the running of Centre on a small individual basis and from various charities and organisations, and even the users have raised a lot of money themselves with activities such as bring and buys, raffles and selling Christmas cards they have made during the year. However Pat found that she was giving more and more hours at the Centre, and an application was made to the Peoples Health Trust whereby 2 years fixed funding was gained. Prior to this funding was obtained from Awards for All. Another application has been put in for the Peoples Health Trust and an outcome should be known at the end of June.

Transformation Cornwall have supported the project along its journey since 2011 and meet up with Pat and Pauline for supervision every six weeks or so.

The future

When asked what plans are for the future of the centre, Pat and Pauline replied they would like a year to consolidate the project. The growth of the Centre has been rapid and they would like time to let things ‘settle down’ and have time to reflect. However there are plans afoot to start a Men’s Group and a group for young mums and, in time, develop work with youth, inter-generational work with local schools and computer training for elderly people alongside the local schools. All the signs are pointing to the Oasis Centre continuing to flourish in the future and to be a ‘heart’ at the centre of the community for many years to come.