



CHALKBOARD

THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE NEWSLETTER



2019

In review

In a change to our usual newsletter format we take a brief look back over another busy year at the Old Schoolhouse, one in which we have continued our collaborations with many different organisations, welcomed several new groups and made some big changes...

JANUARY: We began the new year with the launch of our cookery course. Over 5 weeks participants developed their essential kitchen skills and learnt to produce a range of satisfying, healthy and economic meals. Later in the year we teamed up with two other charity organisations - Recovery Works and SHAP who each sent budding chefs to learn with us. We were also deep into the planning process for our carpark development – this month saw us studying drawings, discussing ideas with the council, and meeting with arborists to help us protect the mature trees near to our worksite.

FEBRUARY: Having started in December, our Winter Warmer weekly lunches (run in conjunction with Knowsley Older People's Voice) ran until the end of February. Those who attended enjoyed a home-cooked two course dinner followed by entertainment or a social activity. As one of our larger offices became available we decided to repurpose the room as a learning space. First Step donated some of their old machines which meant we could create a small computer suite too.

MARCH: Without a doubt, the key event this month was a significant birthday for our centre manager, Karl! Staff and visitors gathered in the Snack Shack to celebrate him and to raise a glass in thanks for his hard work and on-going commitment to the Old Schoolhouse.

April: Tony joined our staff - he has already proved himself to be invaluable, covering the evening shift, helping with maintenance and welcoming visitors. We were now looking in earnest for contractors to carry out the extension to the car park and also busy testing out new software packages to help us monitor and manage our bookings.

MAY: We'd eked it out for a while but this month we finally spent up the last of our COOP garden grant money. This funding has made an enormous difference to our garden project enabling us to buy tools, plants, pots and more. Our Lunchtime Social continued to be popular. We enjoy regular musical performances from Stevie Squeeze, Nuala Duxbury and Huyton Ukulele Troup but this month our guests were treated entertainment from the fabulous SingMe Merseyside Choir. A necessary, but a lot less exciting development, was the installation of a new phone system...

JUNE: This month we learnt what a Section 278 was... What is it you ask? It's a legal contract that needs to be drawn up between the council and anyone, like us, with a project that requires them to make alterations to the pavement or public highway. Little did we know in June that we'd still be struggling to sort out this one aspect of our car park development 6 six months later!

July: We did take a step forward in our project this month when we commissioned Platinum Civil Engineering to carry out the car park works. Meanwhile, around the back of the building, our volunteers continued to look after the garden ensuring we had flowers for all our social events and planting up pots for the patio area outside the hall.

AUGUST: Last August we secured funding from Knowsley Better Together scheme to support our Lunchtime Social project. As the funding period came to an end we were able to use the remaining money to buy some essential kitchen equipment. The new shelving, storage solutions and health and safety related items together would prove to make a real difference to us behind the scenes.

The major news however was that work finally began on the car park! The digger made short work of clearing the area and by the end of the month our extension was complete. It worked out just as we'd hoped and quickly proved its worth – seeing regular use as soon as it became available.

OCTOBER: Genesis is a not for profit, social enterprise bringing skills training into the heart of deprived communities across St Helens and Knowsley. This month they began delivering some of their classes here at the Schoolhouse and are now booked in right through until the summer. Happily, our own Chair Yoga sessions have continued to thrive and, by October, we had gained a group of committed regulars who all seem to be benefitting from this accessible but effective class.

SEPTEMBER: SHARE Knowsley's English lessons for refugees and asylum seekers resumed after the summer break. For this new academic year they were able to increase their provision meaning that they would now be using our classroom three days a week. It has been a pleasure to accommodate this group and to see the progress the students are making with their language skills.

Two new groups also joined us: The Glimmer of Hope Community Choir began rehearsing in our hall on Tuesday evenings and are sounding great. On Wednesdays we now welcome the Dogs Trust who have chosen us as a base for their training sessions.

November: We hosted some large events in our hall this month but otherwise it was largely 'business as usual' meaning lots of visitors! For example (to name just a few): **ADDvanced Solutions** – a provider of learning, coaching and mentoring programmes for professionals working with families where a member has neurodevelopmental conditions or learning difficulties; **The First Step** – supporting victims of domestic violence; **Healthwatch** - the independent consumer champion gathering and representing the views of the public on Health and Adult Social Care; **Huyton History Society**; **Halton St Helens and Knowsley Local Pharmaceutical Committee**; **Imagine Independence** – a charity dedicated to helping people to live independently; **Knowsley Council**; **Knowsley Carers**; **Knowsley Virtual Schools** - working with children who are looked after, their schools, carers and social worker to ensure that they are able to access good education provision; **Knowsley Older People's Voice**; **Rawlings** – Safety and training consultancy services; **Sahir House** – offering HIV support, prevention, information and training across Merseyside; **Springfield bowlers** – use our hall for winter practice. **U3A** – Singing group, creative writing and science talks; and **Workers Educational Association (WEA)** – delivering ICT lessons.

DECEMBER: For the first time we served as a Polling Station for the General Election but otherwise, at the time of writing, we're just beginning to sense a calming down in bookings as we edge towards Christmas. We're looking forward to our Lunchtime Social which will be a little larger than usual as we welcome our volunteers along too. We're excited to have the wonderful Red Rose Concert Band providing our music.

We also end the year with some good news – a date for the final stages of our car park development! Work is set to begin on Monday 6th January.

**Happy Christmas and
best wishes for 2020!**