



CHALKBOARD

THE OLD SCHOOLHOUSE NEWSLETTER

Now, where were we?

It's been a long time since our last newsletter - winter 2019 to be exact! Just as we were gathering our thoughts together for the spring edition of this newsletter... well, you know what happened! Looking back now over our social media posts from the time, it highlights for me just how long we've been living with the many different areas of uncertainty that the pandemic has created.

At the beginning of March 2020, we were full of optimism, having successfully completed the redevelopment of our carpark. Indeed, the finishing touches only took place on the 11th March when the contractors came to paint the lines. It was a painful irony – finally we had the space we'd long needed to accommodate a greater number of visitors and enable simultaneous activities to take place, and yet, just 5 days later, we were contacting people to cancel our Lunchtime Social and yoga sessions. Lockdown wouldn't be officially declared for another week, on 23rd March, but most of our groups and users (including Persian Dancing, Tai Chi and the WEA's Digital Drop In) chose to postpone their meetings ahead of the government's guidance.

There are several charitable organisations based here at the Old Schoolhouse and all of them switched to remote working in line with the government's advice. This meant the office phones were diverted to staff's homes and meetings were carried out over the internet instead of in-person. The Lockdown placed increased pressures on so many people and it has undoubtedly been a real challenge for charities like Knowsley Carers, KPAIS and First Step to meet the increased demand for their services in the face of such restrictions and unprecedented circumstances. Several members of these teams continue to work from home, but we've been really pleased to welcome many back over recent months.

Healthwatch Knowsley have been based at the Schoolhouse for many years. They play an important role offering guidance and supporting residents across the borough with any concerns regarding health and social care services. Their regular newsletters and mailouts served as a reliable and trustworthy source of information and advice throughout the pandemic. Members of the board also shared details of their own personal experiences of lockdown – helping those who read them to feel some sense of connection even while we were all living so separately.



New wildlife Garden



With the building closed for Lockdown we were able to offer more space to SHARE Knowsley and this organisation used the hall as base for their invaluable services over the summer. Their fabulous volunteers worked hard to put together and deliver family food parcels, toiletries and clothing to asylum seekers and families in the area. As some lockdown restrictions were eased over time, we were allowed to reopen for education and training sessions. This meant that SHARE's English lessons were one of the first programmes to resume here.

We tried to contact all those who were members of our Lunchtime Social Club and, to those who were interested, we popped by regularly with a newsletter and a selection of Dave-made biscuits or cakes. It was good for us to be able to maintain that little bit of regular, if brief, contact with those familiar faces we would otherwise miss.

WHAT'S NEXT

These are certainly still strange times, although September has brought some sense of normality with groups returning and bookings increasing. It's been really heartening to see some busy days in the building (and the carpark *finally* full!) None of us can be certain what autumn and winter will bring but we're all hoping for the same thing: that progress towards 'normality' continues safely for everyone.

Best wishes to you all.

Back in early spring we were thrilled to learn that we had been successful with a funding bid to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Environment Fund.

Previously we had three large plots that were in different states of neglect – one had been used for vegetables and rhubarb, while the other two had been laying under a blanket of heavy blue tarpaulin for years to keep the weeds at bay.

As they have so many times before, our incredible volunteer gardeners have worked wonders. The first plot has been transformed with a picnic-patio and small feature lawn - it makes a lovely spot from which to take in the garden. The other two plots were combined to make one large area that we hope will encourage a range of new wildlife into the garden – maybe keep our two rowdy resident squirrels company!

At the centre of this area is a new pond (dug in the fierce summer heat) and we have plant arches, pathways and landscaping. It really is beautiful.

Look out on social media for details of the grand opening!