

The Balsam Centre's Report to Area East - August 2019

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Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress made over the last year. There are no financial implications for the council in this report.

Recommendation

That Area East Committee members note the contents of the report.

Report Detail

The Balsam Centre was set up as an independent charity in 1999.

It was awarded National Lottery funding as a Healthy Living Centre from 2002 -2007 and Local Authority funding as a Children's Centre from 2007 – 2015. Over the last 20 years it has become established as a busy community hub, with a range of integrated services and activities.

The charity's aim is to reduce health and social inequalities and improve quality of life for local people through its four main priorities:

- **Best Start in Life** – working with parents, families, babies, children and young people
- **Social Inclusion** – drawing in people who are lonely or isolated and helping them connect, socialise and build new friendships with others
- **Mental Health** – prevention, early intervention and specialist support for common mental health problems
- **Community Hub** – a welcoming, friendly, vibrant space for numerous social and therapeutic groups and activities

Projects

The two main projects, Like Minds and Maternal Mental Health have continued to attract referrals and both are working at capacity. Like Minds works with approximately 350 individuals annually to support mental and physical health, independence and wellbeing.

The Maternal Mental Health project works with around 75 mothers each year together with their babies and other family members, to help them survive and thrive in the crucial perinatal period.

Against a backdrop of increasing demand and complexity of mental health referrals overall, the need for young people's mental health services has been especially noticeable. A new Youth Café, The Hive, funded by the Grocers Charity, Henry Hoare and the Brue Valley Rotary Club has recently been set up by the Centre at the Baptist Hall in Wincanton.

Groups

A wide variety of new groups and activities are running including Lip Reading, Craft and Play for under Fives, Soft Furnishings, Art group, Drumming and Bring Your Own Craft Project. All provide social

support and social networks for people who are lonely or isolated, as well as the pleasure of learning a new skill.

Centre Improvements and changes

With some 'windfall' funding from the Masonic Charitable Trust, the Centre has been able to significantly update and strengthen its wi-fi infrastructure which was previously extremely unreliable, with the hardware close to collapse. This was followed by a changeover to Office 365. Improved management and protection of personal data through GDPR has necessitated a higher level of secure technology and procedures and the combination has improved security and resilience, as well as reducing technician costs.

The last year has involved substantial planning, management and logistics in the relocation of Conkers Nursery from Churchfields to the Balsam Centre. Notice has been given to our own tenant SCC, in line with the terms of our lease with them, to create the space required. The changeover will happen during August 19, with Conkers being open for business at the Balsam Centre at the start of the 19/20 academic year.

Partner organisations

The Balsam Centre has continued to work in partnership with three other Somerset based mental health charities (the Well Wessex group) to share good practice, skills and opportunities.

Close operational links with the Health Visitor and Midwife teams and referrals from Health Centres are mutually beneficial. There have been numerous visits to the Centre from senior and operational staff from the Clinical Commissioning Group, Local Authority and Somerset Partnership, all have expressed enthusiasm and support for the work and philosophy of the Centre. SSDC and Wincanton Town Council have provided welcome financial support.

However, the loss of critical services such as Getset and the Youth Service from SCC have had a significant knock-on effect in demand for family and young people's support across the county, not least in our area, with hugely increased demand for young people experiencing distress and self-harming.

Looking ahead we hope that the planned changes to NHS delivery through Neighbourhood working will be a positive development for the Centre.

Staff, Volunteers and Trustees

Staff numbers remain steady at around 29 for the Balsam Centre and Conkers combined. All posts are part time apart from the Chief Executive and the Senior Lead Counsellor. There are currently 123 active volunteers (this number temporarily went up to 137 during Glastonbury Festival!) There are 10 Trustees. In November 2018 we were sorry to see Tim Carroll step down due to ill health after 13 years as Chair. We welcome Michael Bainbridge in his place.

Highlights

Our wonderful Maternal Mental Health project was chosen by Comic Relief, for a two minute 'documentary' film which led into the start of the 2019 Red Nose Day appeal. It was shown on BBC 1 just before the 10.00 News.