

Report for Town Council Meeting Tuesday 16th April 2019

Four to five years ago, in partnership with the Children's Centre, St Mary's Watton piloted an After School Club at the Blenheim Centre, Watton, linking in with other Parent Cafes they ran, which were connecting with often hard to reach young families in the area.

With the cutbacks withdrawing resources from focussing on over 5 yr olds, Stop Gap as it was called, had to be stopped from standing in the gap with those families. However, invaluable relationships of trust had been made and the important possibility of working together forged.

At the same time, a new pilot was trialled called Superhero Sunday, which met on a Sunday afternoon once or twice a term. This was engaging with a whole different group of families and also older generations, seeing the fun that this brings. However, both this and the continuation of Messy Church in school holidays proved that what was needed was a more committed **regularity**.

Story Bags was launched on a Monday morning at St Mary's Church and this has seen a growth from 2 or 3 families in 2016, to 35 to 50 families in 2019. The Children's Centre are represented whenever their diminished resource permits them, as the same families from Watton and the surrounding area are present and the communication and support can continue with them. Countercultural Sunday morning ADventure was launched in 2017, which sees families, with Mums and Dads, now arriving to find 'a lifeline', especially when all other resources and facilities go away for the weekend.

Whatever the Children's Services roll out later in the year when the current Children's Centre ceases to exist, a Steering Group made up of different ages and backgrounds of people from community and church are determined that there will still be face to face, one on one provision in this growing town of Watton. We want to join up what we can do and work together for the good of all ages, but if we don't continue to act now, there will be a potentially irretrievable lapse in, rather than seamless care for, the very vulnerable young amongst us.

In October 2018 a Fundraising Effort at St Mary's was launched for a 'Families Matter Keyworker' for the community by the community, who will be able to support this transition, both joining up what has gone well in the past, with the present and taking positive support and self – help forwards. This, through communicating and connecting with those experienced working from within the educational, health, voluntary and other sector organisations.

We're hoping a Centre in Watton will be available to offer meeting space for activities and sessions. We're hoping funding will support initiatives here in this community, not just in Thetford, Attleborough and Swaffham, but as MP Geoff Freeman described, also in, 'Forgotten Watton'....

Whatever different perspectives we have, we surely hear the news of rising child and family poverty and one of our Mayor's charities is 'The Daisy Programme' which works alongside those courageous enough to admit domestic violence.

Thank you so much for all your support thus far but we have a way to travel. We don't need to dig deep, before we find the drive for people having the best chance to be the best they can be, on our shared watch. But we need to join all our expertise and good will to make it happen for the community by the community.

Please don't overlook this need to raise the money to support a 'Families Matter Keyworker', to champion strategically strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow for everyone. What does a flourishing community look like? One made up of flourishing individuals, whose footfall brings life, energy and confidence to the High Street and every part of the community.

Paul Gerry Foster