

Helping Hands



Issue 1. Spring 2015

A message from our Director

Welcome to the first issue of Helping Hands in our new look which we believe better reflects our vision to provide lifelong services for disabled people, from childhood to old age.

Since I last wrote, Samantha Cameron hosted an event at No. 10 Downing Street for us to celebrate Thomley's incredible journey. With us came a handful of families who visit Thomley, long-term donors, staff and Trustees, and other key people who have been involved in Thomley's evolution. Samantha explained from her own experience how essential it is for families with disabled children to have a place where they can have a good day out together, free from the judgement of others. Mirroring Samantha's words, Murray, son of our patron Ken Bruce, prepared his own moving speech. Murray has autism and is non-verbal, so delivered his speech using assistive communication software. Within his plea he said 'I ask the world to realise that we yearn to be accepted as everyone else and to be liked regardless of what abilities we have'.

It was with great sadness that I learnt that Kai Smith, the smiley boy pictured here in his wheelchair, died just four days later. His mother Vikki told me how proud she was that they had been given this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

We have many plans for 2015, starting with a pilot project to provide transport to visitors unable to get to us by other means. Using our wheelchair-accessible minibus, schools and groups will benefit initially. Ultimately we will offer this service to our families from key towns within a 30-mile radius. The Robert McAlpine Charity have kindly given us a kick start grant to trial the service, with the aim of achieving a financially self-sustaining service in time. With this in mind we are calling for committed volunteer drivers. Please get in touch if you are interested in helping.

Claire Acworth



Thomley at Downing Street, from left to right:
Chair of Trustees Anna Fox, Patron & Radio 2's Ken Bruce
with son Murray, Vikki with son Kai, Samantha Cameron,
Director Claire Acworth, Carole with son George

Our fresh new look



We have come a long way since we were founded thirteen years ago, and each year more than one thousand disabled people visit us from the length and breadth of the country.

We are proud that our work continues to grow, however few other places in the country are able to offer the same level of support. This means that we must work even harder to ensure everyone who needs our service knows about Thomley.

For this reason, one of our long-standing supporters has recently helped us undergo a mini 'rebrand'. Thankfully, from his experience as a businessman, this anonymous sponsor recognised the need for us to improve the way we reach potential service users and the general public.

Our flexible new logo is a bird's-eye view of our cycle track and can be used in many ways. This, with our new strapline, better reflects the full scope of our work with disabled and non-disabled people of all ages. Feedback on these changes has been very positive and we are already beginning to raise our profile.

We want to thank: Cream Design for creating our new designs; Quires for printing our new signs and literature; Harlequin for our uniforms; Lumpy Lemon and Little Bird Web Services for our new website (coming soon); and our colleague Joe Kitchen for managing the whole project!

Help us grow, as our visitors grow older

We have recently upped our support to disabled adults, now running a weekly service throughout the year. We welcome adults to come and make new friends, play games, join in with daily activities such as cooking and taking exercise together, or benefit from our specialised sensory room. Disabled teenagers also attend during school holidays, helping them to prepare for adulthood.

In time, we intend to support disabled adults throughout the week, providing more opportunities for work experience in our new café, or perhaps in liaison with local businesses. These plans are still in their infancy, but we know that we will need ongoing support from our donors if we are to further develop these much-needed services for adults, which currently cost £1,825 a week to run.

Their future in your hands

We look to a future where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else. Where they can play, work and socialise alongside non-disabled friends and peers.

We know that to make this a reality we all have a long way to go and vital services like ours will be still be needed for many years to come. This is why we hope our supporters will remember us when they come to make a Will.

Legacy gifts, no matter how small, are valuable to charities. A bequest to Thomley costs nothing now but could help ensure our service is available for future generations.

If you would like to discuss including a legacy gift to Thomley in your Will, please contact Harriet.

We welcome Gill

Following our annual general meeting in January, we are pleased to announce that Gill Porter-Smith has joined our board of Trustees.

Gill was the driving force behind our Circus Ball last summer which raised over £24,000 to help furnish our new café and social centre.



She comes to Thomley with a wealth of business and marketing experience and we are grateful to have her as part of our team.

Annual accounts

We have now published our financial statement for the period 31 Aug 2013 to 1 Sept 2014. This reports an income of £493,284, expenditure of £453,439 and a net income of £39,845, which will help to bolster our reserves should we fall into financial difficulty.

Copies of these accounts are available upon request, or may be downloaded from the Charity Commission's website.

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