



# Helping Hands

**Thomley**  
A place for people of all abilities  
and disabilities



Issue 2. Summer 2015

‘...a safe place where he is not made to feel different...’

In this issue we thought you might like to hear directly from one of our families. We thank Kate and her son for sharing their story:

‘Thomley is extremely important to our family, particularly for my 16-year-old son who has high-functioning autism. We visited Thomley when it first opened and made occasional Saturday trips with him and his older sister over the next few years, where favourite activities included the amazing ball pool with suction pipe and the wide outdoor swing, which kept him content for hours. Year by year, the facilities improved and expanded, although the welcoming staff and the acceptance of his autism and idiosyncrasies were there from the start.

In secondary school, my son visited Thomley fortnightly with his fellow autism base students. By that time, the teenage den had been created he was very keen to help set up the Wii but would also be persuaded to move out of his comfort zone to play on “rival” consoles and tried acting games on the Xbox 360. When the weather was fine, he also enjoyed the go-karts and swings. My son finds school challenging, so having a school visit to Thomley as a highlight in the week was important to him, as well as being a chance to relax with the other students, which helped his social skills enormously.

My son is very dependent on family and he had been resistant to joining any clubs or developing a social life out of school or home, so we were delighted (and relieved) when Thomley started a fortnightly youth club. He was very keen to attend because the staff and setting were familiar and he felt comfortable there. Some of his school friends go to youth club too, but he has also made new friendships with boys who have similar interests to him. It is important for my son to be able share the vast of knowledge he has about computers and games consoles, and the majority of people in his life do not have the knowledge to appreciate what he is telling them; but at the youth club, he is with like-minded people who have similar special interests and he really enjoys exchanging facts and opinions with them.

The Thomley staff understand that for most autistic teenage boys, school can be a challenge; so a social club in the evening needs to be the opposite. There are different activities each week, imaginatively designed with the boys’ interests in mind (e.g. Lego, Manga art, computer animation), but if they would sometimes rather sit on the sofa and chat, they feel no pressure to participate in every activity. The youth club also gives us the opportunity to get together with other parents to compare notes and exchange experiences in bringing up our boys, when, in similar discussions among parents of young people who are not autistic, we can feel quite isolated.

Without Thomley, my son would have almost no social life outside school, as unlike other boys his age, he does not have the social ability or confidence to meet up with friends independently and cannot easily participate in mainstream clubs. Through Thomley he has made friends and developed much more effective social skills. It is a safe place where he doesn’t stand out and is not made to feel different, as he so often is when we are out in public. The staff at Thomley are an incredibly dedicated team who are friendly, fun, endlessly resourceful and extremely patient. They have always made him feel included and have boosted his self-confidence by celebrating his skills with technology (for example, as he walked through the front door one Saturday, a member of staff exclaimed enthusiastically that they were pleased he had arrived as he would know how to sync the Wii controllers). They have listened to families and have provided what has been previously lacking for disabled children in our area. He has gone to birthday parties at Thomley, visited with school, met his friends on teenage days in the holidays and attended the youth club regularly. Thomley is a major and invaluable part of his and our family’s lives. ’

# Thomley wins Oscar (maybe)

**We have been working on two short films about Thomley, to help promote the centre to more disabled people and families, as well as to potential donors.**

Our youth group have recently produced their own short film about Thomley. The club scripted and presented this video themselves, with the support of Bucks TV. The teenagers agreed and carefully planned each scene prior to filming.

Our thanks to Bucks TV and congratulations to all the young people involved. We are proud of the final cut, which we'll share with you via our website soon.

Meanwhile, we have also been planning a new PR video with a media production company. This project is being generously sponsored by Quanta, a recruitment company in Berkhamsted.

Our patron, Radio 2's Ken Bruce, will narrate the film, which will be aimed at anyone who could benefit from visiting Thomley, or might be able to support our work.

With footage of a typical day at the centre, we hope this film will raise our profile and give disabled people confidence that Thomley is a place which will suit their needs.

## Charity Golf Day at Radley College

Zemsports are organising a special golf day for us at the beautiful grounds of Radley College on Thursday 27th August. Tee off at 2PM.

Thomley's families and supporters are entitled to half-price entry - £30 per person or £80 for a team of four players. Ticket includes refreshments and BBQ and there will be plenty to entertain the whole family. Places are filling up fast. To book yours, call Mark on: 07861 885761 or email: [inbox@zemsports.com](mailto:inbox@zemsports.com)



## More fun and more mud!

This summer we will offer a new 'mud kitchen' and go-kart racetrack, aimed at encouraging more outdoor fun...and probably quite a lot of mud.

Our new mud kitchen has been a hit with budding cooks, young and old. Complete with toy oven, pots and pans, and a chalk board for recipes, the kitchen has already inspired some very muddy creations.

A culinary competition will run during the school break so be sure to check out our Facebook page for pictures of some of the best mud pies.

For racing enthusiasts we are creating a new go-kart course and tournament this summer. Race season will start with Thomley's first ever Go-Kart Grand Prix, followed by weekly time trials. And the winner of the quickest lap time at the end of the summer will be crowned the Thomley Stig.



## Councillors place bids for Thomley

This past year, Chairman of Oxfordshire County Council Anne Purse has promoted Thomley as her chosen charity, helping to raise awareness of our work across local Councils.

In May, Anne celebrated the end of her term with a special dinner and charity auction for friends and fellow Councillors. The evening raised over £2,000 towards our work with disabled people.

We are privileged to have been Anne's chosen cause and we thank her for all she has done to support us.

## Stay in touch:

**Claire Acworth**  
Director  
[claire@thomley.org.uk](mailto:claire@thomley.org.uk)  
01844 338380 Ext 118

**Harriet Hieatt-Smith**  
Fundraising & PR Manager  
[harriet@thomley.org.uk](mailto:harriet@thomley.org.uk)  
07796 332395

**Trustees** Anna Fox (Chair), Pam Rose, John Lubbock, Gill Porter-Smith  
Andrew Lockhart, Mary Stiles, Maurice Pullen & Wendi Coles

[facebook.com/FriendsOfThomley](https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfThomley)  
[twitter.com/Thomley\\_](https://twitter.com/Thomley_)  
Menmarsh Road, Worminghall, Bucks HP18 9JZ  
Registered Charity No 1089224

**[www.thomley.org.uk](http://www.thomley.org.uk)**

**Patron** Ken Bruce  
**Fundraising Ambassador** Josephine Fitzalan Howard  
**Sports Ambassador** Bryan Steel