

New contracts brighten horizons for The Ark

The Ark looks financially secure for the coming year after gaining three new funding streams worth £120,000.

But the money is all targeted at new projects and the charity's education programme may need to be cut, or prices raised, if additional money isn't found soon.

"It is a challenging time for the sector so it's especially gratifying that we have won these contracts," said The Ark's chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker.

"It has certainly helped that The Ark had been through this situation before and was in a good position to move forward in this new world of tendering for contracts instead of applying for grants. For all groups in the voluntary sector, long term plans are important and so our trustees are focussing on a long term strategy.

"We will be getting users involved in plans for September onwards and the introduction of new course dates based on three terms each year. And we are exploring educational funding opportunities. We have in mind the sort of educational programme we want to deliver and will be getting the input of our service users before the end of term to make sure we have got it right."

The Ark is still waiting to hear about its application for Transition funding from the government and its bid to run a range of courses for Wokingham

Borough Council. But it has won:

- a £60,000 contract from Wokingham Borough Council to provide fundraising advice, training support and communications services to the voluntary sector;
- £50,000 with the NHS's East Berkshire Community Teams for People with Learning Disabilities and Wokingham's Community Team for People with a Learning Disability for a collaborative project which will help adults with learning disabilities through a new programme to develop relationship skills and extend social networks;
- £10,000 from The Mercers' Company to run Mondays@Marmalade, an inclusive radio project for people on the autistic spectrum which will give them a voice and develop social and transferable skills.

No one is more delighted at winning the new contracts than Andrea. She is particularly pleased that the Wokingham Council contract means welcoming aboard Dave Soper who she described as "a fantastic asset to the organisation and to the voluntary sector as a whole". She added: "Over the coming year The Ark will provide an innovative approach to supporting the community and voluntary sector to ensure that local organisations have the skills and are best placed to take advantage of

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Kristian takes on new teaching role

Kristian Liddiard, who has taught at The Ark since last summer and was instrumental in setting up Radio Marmalade, has taken on the new role of teaching co-ordinator at The Ark.

Kristian (pictured below) started his working life in the building industry and later became a tutor with NACRO, one of the largest work-related learning providers in the UK, designing courses for 16-19 year olds not in education, employment or training.



The courses, based on arts and sports, provided life skills and improved the wellbeing of the disadvantaged young people.

Kristian subsequently teamed up with fellow Ark tutor Darren Holmes to form Locked In, a company which delivers radio training particularly for socially excluded people and marginalised groups, and the two of them started running DJ courses at The Ark and set up Radio Marmalade last year. Kristian has also been leading The Ark's Community and Communication course. "We are going through exciting times in the courses The Ark provides and I feel very privileged to be part of that," Kristian said. "Seeing the smiles on the learners' faces is just great. They seem to be enjoying all of it and hopefully we can make it sustainable for the future. Having courses like this makes The Ark a great place to work."

** See page 2 for details about the new courses.*



AIM to consult soon

AIM, the Ark In Motion forum, is to hold an event soon to ascertain views on what the charity should do if it is not successful in obtaining continuing educational funding.

With Bracknell Forest Borough Council not renewing its adult education contract, which The Ark has held for four years and which has supported not only its courses and Radio Marmalade but paid a big proportion of the rent, The Ark could be faced with closing some of its classes and increasing prices for those it continues to run: "We need the input of our users to know what they want us to do," said The Ark's chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker.

RED LETTER DAYS

The Ark will be closed on June 8 and 9 for Jewish High Holy Days; and for health and safety reasons on June 23 when the studio is renovated.

New art, dance, music and radio courses prove popular

A bigger range of courses is being offered by The Ark thanks to new funding streams. Drama sessions continue on Monday mornings and there's now Planet Dance from 1-3pm led by dance teacher Sarah Boreham (pictured right in photo below left). Students have been exploring dance around the world and have been particularly fascinated by Bangra which they learned is a folk dance by Punjabi farmers dating back to the 11th century.



"The classes are very energetic with lots of interesting areas being looked into. Sarah is a great tutor and it's good to have her on board," said teaching coordinator, Kristian Liddiard.

The afternoons also see the new Mondays@Marmalade sessions teaching radio skills to young people on the autistic spectrum while Monday evenings still feature the Unity drama classes with singing, dancing and drama games from 7-9pm.

Wednesday evenings now include Rocked In when Kristian teaches aspects of music. The students have decided to make their own in-

struments and use them to record a song.

"They have been inspired by Jug Band music of the 1920s-30s when musicians made their own instruments, one of which was a jug," Kristian explained. "The learners will be using these influences to take apart a modern day pop song to its most basic form and put it back together using the instruments they have made."

Valerie Oliver, who won a Vodafone World of Difference Award, is now teaching drawing from 10am-noon and 2-4pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Students have been learning the basic principles of drawing and experimenting with different materials and tools and exploring art in new ways (some of it pictured right). As well as helping learners to work with crayons and charcoal, Valerie has been making use of other resources at The Ark, and is keen to recycle materials. The classes are proving very popular and have attracted several new learners to The Ark. Funding ends in July but Kristian said that if The Ark can get more money, the classes will continue.

Meanwhile Thursdays see the continuation of the popular Community and Communication course from 10am-3pm which has been looking at citizenship issues like elections and the health service and studying the art of interviewing; while the evenings host the popular DJ course from 7-9pm.

The Ark helps in big book giveaway

The Ark helped to spread the word when it distributed 48 free books as part of World Book Night.

Darren Holmes, a project leader at The Ark, together with Valerie Oliver and Taylor Williams, who also work for the charity, handed out the books to residents at Holly House and Rainforest Walk, two supported housing projects in Bracknell for young, single people at risk. On behalf of The Ark, Valerie chose *TheLife of Pi*, Yann Martel's winner of the Mann Booker Prize and other awards, from 25 titles selected for the big book giveaway on March 7.



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funding opportunities in these challenging times. The Ark will also help voluntary and community organisations find appropriate training for staff and volunteers."

Josie Wragg, the council's head of strategic partnerships, said: "We consulted with the voluntary and community sector to find out what sort of support they most valued and help with training, fundraising and communications were the areas that came out strongly, so we are delighted to have The Ark onboard to provide these highly-valued services. The Ark has a track record of providing quality services to vulnerable adults and I am sure it will maintain its high standards in this new role."

The joint project won national recognition for an innovative idea that is expected to improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities as well as reducing mental health problems and safeguarding issues.

The programme's main strands are to:

- develop a database of social and leisure opportunities;
- develop a safe matching service for individuals looking for friendships and relationships;
- provide opportunities to develop social interaction skills, and to deliver accessible teaching sessions to

improve knowledge of sexual health and relationship skills. Andrea commented: "This award clearly demonstrates the importance and worth of placing service users and patients at the heart of projects, right from the planning stage, and partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sectors."

John Gardiner, a community nurse involved in the project, added: "We're delighted to have won this award and especially proud that we are working with The Ark. Our programme will make a real difference to our service users and allow them to experience a whole range of activities that most of us in our everyday living take for granted." The Mondays@Marmalade grant from The Mercers will be used to provide support for young people on the autistic spectrum during their transition to adulthood and break down the barriers preventing successful integration into the community by delivering guided learning and support for participants for a year.

They will be trained in radio presentation and production and will produce four hours of live broadcasting each week on Radio Marmalade. The project will combine tutored sessions, live broadcasts and community engagement through interviewing.

Why Dave's new job is like déjà vu

One of the newest recruits to The Ark is Dave Soper who, although new to the charity, is not new to his role as funding advisor to the voluntary sector in Wokingham.

In fact, depending on how you want to weigh things up, this is the third, fourth or even fifth time that he has taken on this role. Twice previously he had the same title when working for a different organisation, and twice it had been a major part of his role in other posts he had held – and all in the space of six years!



* Dave pictured with fox at Paradise Park, Broxbourne.

When he left school in the 1970s his career was very different. Having sold car parts while at school, he had to choose between continuing in this field and taking a pay cut to become a nuclear scientist. He chose the latter and was a scientist for 15 years. He then decided to become a first class cricket umpire. Not such a strange choice as he played cricket in the south of England to a very high standard. He passed all his exams but his wish to be a player sometimes and an umpire when he wasn't playing didn't suit the committee, so he hit it on the head.

Dave had had a connection with the voluntary sector for a long time. Prior to the inauguration of the London Marathon his school used to organise the capital's biggest charity walk. He did some fundraising for the Cystic Fibrosis Trust and three local cricket clubs and was one of the people who set up the Association of Cystic Fibrosis Adults (UK). He achieved his first Big Lottery Award in 2000 and used this as a springboard to move into the voluntary sector full-time. Currently he fundraises for two charities in other parts of Berkshire.

These days his hobbies are sport, travelling and nature. He doesn't particularly like football, preferring cricket, rugby and horse racing. He part owns some racing greyhounds.

His interest in seeing the world started after he was injured skiing in the French Alps such that he couldn't ski the following winter, so he bought a round-the-world air ticket

and saw a few different countries all in one go. His favourite destinations have been New Zealand and Sri Lanka.

"When I do visit different countries I love to get to see the local wildlife, mountains and rivers. I'm not a beach person, but enjoy going out on the water to see the aquatic life." he said.

He lives with his wife Debra, two dogs and one fish.

Students tackle High Sheriff and NHS chief

It's been a busy and productive time for learners on The Ark's Community and Communication course.

Simon Judge had prepared to interview Lady Catherine Stevenson, the High Sheriff of Berkshire, when she attended the AIM and Radio Marmalade launch night in January. But the event was so hectic that she agreed to return for a live

interview on Radio Marmalade on March 3 when she was questioned by Simon and fellow student Karmenie Ashley.

Simon welcomed Lady Stevenson who first answered questions about the history of the role of High Sheriff and what it entails today. She explained that she went to Oxford to study physics but found it difficult to get work as a scientist because of discrimination against women. The civil service was more tolerant and she got a job with the Meteorological Office in Bracknell. Lady Stevenson still lives locally, at Ascot, with her husband, Sir Hugh Stevenson (he was knighted last year for services to the financial services industry). She did not know why people were nominated for High Sheriff – the names of three people for each county are put forward each November, and the term of office runs from March 25. These days High Sheriffs have few genuine responsibilities and their functions are largely representational and ceremonial. Lady Stevenson had been kept busy during her year with a wide range of public engagements and she gave the impression she had enjoyed every minute. One of the highlights had been a reception at Windsor Castle by the Queen for the Emir of Qatar.

Lorretta Brookes, Alan Dale, Simon Judge and Steph O'Connell interviewed John Hedger, chair of Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, on May 12. Speaking candidly, Mr Hedger said: "Is the system perfect? No. Does it go badly wrong? Yes, sometimes horrendously wrong."

* To hear all he had to say, listen to the interview on Radio Marmalade at 2.30pm on June 2.

School adopts The Ark

The Ark is now working closely with Heathermount, a specialist school for 5-19 year olds at the high functioning end of the Autism or Asperger spectrum. The Ascot school has adopted The Ark as its charity for the year and accepted Challenge 500 to raise £500. The school has already donated £251 from its Easter giving.

"We are very pleased that we will be working closely with Heathermount to accredit some of our education courses which we will be running for their pupils as well as for other learners," said The Ark's chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker.



Club Marmalade grows in popularity

Club Marmalade, the night club held on the last Sunday of most months, is growing in popularity since it moved to its new venue at Taboo in Bracknell. More than 120 members and carers attended the April club night. They included a large contingent from Slough who enjoyed it so much they said they would be back soon.

More accept challenge to help raise funds for The Ark

The countdown is on for Challenge 500's biggest event yet. Radio Marmalade, The Ark's inclusive radio station which has been broadcasting on the internet since last summer, is to stage a 100-hour live **broadcasting marathon** to raise funds to help keep its parent organisation afloat. The marathon will run from 10am on May 30 until 2pm on June 3 at the Radio Marmalade studio at The Ark's headquarters.

The 100 hours will be presented by Ark students, staff, volunteers and members of the community. Many of the DJs have some form of disability and have been trained on The Ark's Community and Communication and DJ courses and the new Mondays@Marmalade sessions, an

inclusive radio project for people on the autistic spectrum which gives them a voice and develops social and transferable skills. Some have their own weekly radio programmes and act as DJs at the monthly Club Marmalade nights at Taboo nightclub in Bracknell. The marathon can be heard at www.radiomarmalade.org.uk To help this venture, download a sponsor form from The Ark's website, www.theark.org.uk, or send a donation to The Ark Trust.

Challenge 500, which calls for 500 individuals, groups or businesses to raise £500 this year, got off to a flying start with a **personal donation** by a well-wisher of £500. Then on January 22 a **Race Night** organised by Paul Bidwell, one of The Ark's trustees, raised £502.30.

A **Curry Night** netted a further £400 when Richard Knight, chair of The Ark's trustees, organised the Night of Spice on March 23 at the Sultan Balti Palace Restaurant in Market Place, Wokingham, which was happy to run the event with

The Square Bar next door, with £13 from each diner donated to the charity.

"The goal was to get 35 to 40 people to the event to help raise £500. With the donation from the meals and a raffle we raised £400 which we are more than happy with. I think everyone had a good evening and I know they enjoyed the food. I would personally like to thank Athar Ali and Mark

Miles who manage the two premises for supporting The Ark," Richard said.

Richard was due to raise more money by running the Bracknell Half Marathon on May 8 but had to pull out due to injury. He and a few family members have entered the **Wokingham Bikeathon** on June 26

when they hope to raise £1000 in sponsorship by cycling 35 miles round the streets of Wokingham.

Meanwhile Stewart McDougall is to take part in a sponsored **wheelchair push** on June 4. Stewart, 20, will be pushed by his sister, Cassandra, 23, over a distance of about 2.6 miles along The Long Walk in Windsor Great Park.

Stewart has been attending The Ark since the start of this year and has his own programme, DJ Papichulo Show, which broadcasts mainly Latin music including salsa, from 3-6pm on Wednesdays.

And Scott Waller, a volunteer at The Ark, is planning to raise at least £1000 from a **dance and musical theatre show** at The Wilde Theatre, Bracknell, on February 5, 2012, which will feature international performers as well as some of The Ark's learners. The Ark hopes more people will take up Challenge 500. Call or email The Ark office to tell us your plans and discuss how we can help.

CHALLENGE 500

Matthew's worthwhile experience

Matthew Pearson, aged 17, came to The Ark to gain work experience during the spring term while studying a pathways course at college. And he says it was a thoroughly worthwhile and enjoyable experience.

He helped with data entry and a range of other useful tasks.

"Each week I've been doing different things. First there was an induction session when I was shown around the building and did numeracy and literacy assessments to see how capable I am before I start different work elsewhere. The people I worked with are very friendly and I got on with them very well," he said. "I thought it was very enjoyable working here and I've learned from new things and I have gained confidence and hopefully I can get a job in the future."

Diary Dates

Term ends: July 15 (radio broadcasts will continue).

Next term starts: September (date TBC).

Club Marmalade at new venue -Taboo, Bracknell:

June 26, July 31, September 25, October 30.

Radio Marathon (Challenge 500) 10am May 30 - 2pm June 3.



Nice one Trevor!

Trevor Rowden, a volunteer and learner at The Ark, captained a team from Bracknell Day Centre which won a seven-a-side football tournament organised by Ravenswood Village at Cantley Park, Wokingham, on May 11. One of the two Ravenswood teams was runner-up in one of the two leagues which featured nine teams including one from Holland.



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