



AIM meeting will pave way for future services at The Ark

AIM, the Ark In Motion forum, is to hold a meeting on July 26 to decide what path the charity should take in the future as far as its service provision is concerned. Changes in funding and the decision of Bracknell Forest Borough Council not to renew the adult education contract it has had with The Ark for the past four years means a fresh look needs to be taken at the type of service the charity provides for its users in the coming academic year.

The forum meeting will also discuss, and take a vote on, making The Ark a full membership organisation; and will look at how to organise itself to operate effectively now that transition fund money is available to support this process.

The event, which will mix business and pleasure, will be held at The Crooked Billet pub in Honey Hill, Wokingham, from 5-8pm. Food will be provided free for service users of The Ark and family carers. Professional carers and personal assistants will be asked to pay a small fee to cover the cost. Those attending will be able to buy their own drinks.

"We will have some fun and games as well as holding the meeting," said The Ark's chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker.

"The contract we had with Bracknell Forest supported not only our courses and Radio Marmalade but paid a big proportion of the rent," Andrea explained. "It means The Ark will not be educationally funded next year. We do now have other funding streams which help meet some of our overheads but it does mean we need to rethink what we do from September. A number of different proposals will be put to the AIM focus group about the type of activities our users want to do."

The group will want to know, for instance, whether they want to see a change in the range of classes and activities The Ark runs, and whether they would be prepared to pay more for some of them? Do they want courses which follow term dates or would they prefer them to be 10-weeks long so there can be more courses and one off sessions each year. Do they want social events?"

"As a user-led organisation we need the input of our users to know what they want us to do," Andrea added.

During the coming year, The Ark expects to have a Social Return on Investment evaluation which will help it with future educational funding applications.

To ensure enough food is ordered, anyone wanting to attend the event should contact Andrea by July 19 — phone 01344 755528 or email info@theark.org.uk

Girls night in

The Ark is to host a social evening with a difference it will be for females only and they'll probably be wearing pyjamas!

Following a request from some of the learners at The Ark for a Girlie Night like that in the film *Grease*, The Ark is to lay on treats as well as girlie films, music, chocolates and popcorn at the studio from 6-10pm on July 29.

Come dressed for a leisurely night in and bring your own drinks. But make sure you buy a ticket (priced £3) in advance.



Volunteers needed to keep Dis:Course on course

The Ark has launched a recruitment campaign for volunteers to help run

Dis:Course, the disability information service which serves Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey and Hampshire. Helpers are needed to check, update and input information into the Dis:Course database; and to answer or respond to telephone enquiries.

The database work is suited to anyone who is computer literate but those wanting to undertake phone work will need to be experienced and possibly undergo some training.

Anyone interested should contact The Ark on 01344 755528 or email info@theark.org.uk



New organisation is now a FACT

The £60,000 contract The Ark won from Wokingham Borough Council to provide fundraising advice, training support and communications services to the voluntary sector is up and running.

Called FACT (Funding Advice, Communications and Training)

Wokingham, it is being managed by Andrea McCombie-Parker with Darren Holmes as training advisor, Dave Soper as funding advisor and Scott Waller handling administration.



It has established a database of voluntary and community groups either in or serving Wokingham borough; set up a website with a wealth of information relevant to the sector; and held its first training session. Called *Making A Splash*, it taught attendees how to engage with the media, make use of newspapers, TV and radio, and write press releases. Meanwhile Dave has held numerous meetings with organisations to discuss and help with their funding needs.

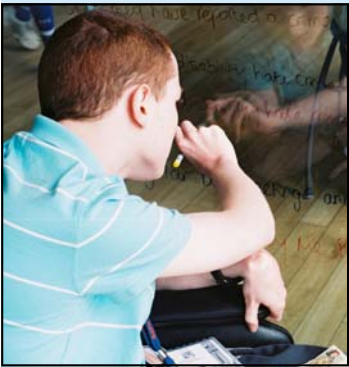
Ark lends support to anti-hate crime event

The Ark joined National Mencap and Wokingham Learning Disability Partnership for an event to mark National Learning Disability Week.

This year's theme is Stand By Me and the event at the Acorn Centre in Woosehill, Wokingham, on June 23 marked the launch of a three-year campaign against hate crime. National Mencap is calling on the police, criminal justice system and courts to end hate crime against people with a learning disability.

More than 150 people including Wokingham Borough Mayor, Cllr Dianne King, and Deputy Town Mayor, Cllr Martin Bishop, attended and lent their support to the campaign.

As part of the national campaign, Mencap is asking the police to commit to 10 promises that will make a huge difference for the victims of disability hate crime. At the event, Police Community Support Officer Claire Nicholls pledged police support to the promise by formally signing up on the window of



the community centre's café. Good progress in this direction has already been made in Wokingham so to help further develop awareness and understanding between people with disabilities and the police, it was decided to host an activity everyone could get involved with – a five-a-side football tournament.

The Ark's Radio Marmalade provided music for the day while The Ark laid on lunch and art

teacher Valerie Oliver ran an arts session which included painting on the café windows (pictured above).

Other activities included a drumming workshop led by Rhythm Zone and sports day activities organised by Support Horizons as well as information stands run by Mencap's community based advisers who support people with learning disabilities; and information on community safety and preventing hate crime from the local community wardens, police and local advocacy organisation CLASP.

The Ark's Community and Communication class has since recorded a radio programme about the event and hopes to conduct a Skype interview with Mencap's national chief executive, Mark Goldring.

"The Ark is very pleased to have been asked to help run this event and is especially grateful to the Indian Community Centre in Reading for providing food for the occasion," said the trust's chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker.

BROC's generous gesture

Students at The Ark were thrilled when representatives of the



* Peter Hull of The Friends of BROC presents the cheque to Trevor Rowden.

Friends of BROC – Bracknell Resource and Opportunity Centre – called in to present a cheque for £2,000 (pictured left).

Several people who attend The Ark used to go to BROC and the organisation was keen that cash left

in the kitty when the centre wound down should help people who had made use of the facility.

In line with the Friends of BROC's wishes, The Ark will use the money for social and leisure activities: "We are very grateful to the Friends of BROC for making this generous donation," said The Ark's chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker.

What's in a name?

The Ark couldn't have a more fitting name if recent events are anything to go by.

First students enjoyed a visit from Pepsi, a five-year-old black Labrador, who Graeme Lodge, a learner and DJ at The Ark, has been helping to look after as part of a pioneering project.

"I first met Pepsi on January 26. I like looking after her a lot. Pepsi calms me down. She gives me confidence," Graeme said.

He got to know Pepsi through a pilot scheme by the national charity, Dogs for the Disabled, and the Lower Earley-based Kingwood Trust which enables people

with autism and Asperger's to live in their own homes and enjoy full and active lives. The project aims to see whether dogs might be able to aid the development and independence of autistic adults.

"I have a weekly visit from Jan Blake of Dogs for the Disabled and Pepsi," Graeme explained. "We have been for walks, we went to the local garden centre for lunch and we went strawberry picking. Sometimes I train Pepsi or groom her."

Not long after Pepsi's visit, there was the curious case of the cat in the night!

Scott Waller, who works at The Ark, hadn't seen one of her cats, Jack, for more than a month. Turning up for work one night, she saw a cat resembling Jack sitting outside The Ark.

"He responded to his name but I couldn't believe it could possibly be him," she said. "I wanted check his collar but I could neither see nor feel it round his neck. Then I saw something blue across the top of a front leg."

It took a couple of hours to calm the cat enough to get him inside to check him over. And sure enough, it was Jack! He had somehow got his front right leg stuck through his collar which had caused gaping wounds round his neck and leg. Once home Jack ate several dishes of food and had a good sleep. And within two weeks he was just like new!

"I have no idea how he found me," Scott said. "I have to drive round woods to get to The Ark so may be he was in the woods and kept hearing my car and eventually tracked it down. I just wish he could talk so he could tell me what really happened."

Meanwhile The Ark is very grateful to Keep Mobile, the local transport charity, for providing a super new home at its Wokingham base for the trust's chickens who needed to be moved to make room for The Ark's new vegetable garden.



Gardens blossom in Ark facelift



The Ark's garden has undergone a major facelift thanks to an international computing company.

The charity has been building a relationship with the Salesforce.com Foundation for the past four years, initially by using the company's software and more recently its volunteer projects.



* Work in progress on the raised flower beds.

Last month the firm sent 60 volunteer staff to spend a day at The Ark's premises. And by the end of it the front gardens had been spruced, the back garden boasted a raised flower bed and new vegetable plots (pictured above), the corridors had new carpeting, the wardrobe room had been redecorated, the Dis:Course office and corridors had a fresh coat of paint, there was new shelving in the

welcome room and CEO's office, the windows had been cleaned and a new sign had been painted and hung by the front door.

"We usually see them once or twice a year and are always hugely grateful for what they do," said Andrea McCombie-Parker, The Ark's chief executive. "This time I think we got about 300 "man" hours and £2,600 in materials. It has made a big difference and the projects they worked on are things we would never have been able to afford or do by ourselves."

Free night at Club Marmalade



Club Marmalade will be celebrating summer and the end of the academic year with a **free admission** Pirates of the Caribbean beach party on July 31.

So put on your best pirate or beach themed attire and join friends new and old at Club Marmalade at the Taboo nightclub in Market Street, Bracknell, from 7pm until late.

We are sure it's going to be a night to remember! There will be no Club Marmalade in August but, while you've got your diaries out, make a note of the club night themes (based on what members have told us they want) for the coming autumn: September – Western; October – Hallowe'en; November – Grease.

How Barry brings business acumen to The Ark



A wish to find out what kind of services and facilities are available for disabled adults was among the reasons Barry Delehanty (pictured left) became a trustee of The Ark.

Barry originally trained as an accountant but no longer works as one. Instead he is employed by Waitrose where he is responsible for looking

after the company's commercial relationships, skills he uses in his role as an Ark trustee.

"It is relevant to The Ark because The Ark has commercial and business relationships. Even though it isn't profit making, it has to be business-like with the people who buy services from it, not the clients but the councils etc," he explained.

Barry has also been working recently with chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker, and fellow trustee Paul Bidwell on commercial strategies, how the trust operates and makes use of its building.

Does he enjoy being a trustee of The Ark? "I like it a lot," he said. "It's very, very different to what I would do on a day to day basis and the people are very different.

Because I can use some of the skills that I use in my work I can be useful without having to try too hard!"

Originally from Ireland, Barry had lived in London since 1994 and moved to Finchampstead a year ago. He became an Ark trustee a few months later. He is married with a son of eight who is disabled and daughter aged 10. He became a trustee because he wanted to do something that benefits the community and was attracted to The Ark because of its range of clients: "I wanted to catch an idea of what life might be for my son in the future, when he grows up, in terms of what might be available to him."

New shows on Radio Marmalade



Radio Marmalade has been going from strength to strength with more people from the local community hosting their own weekly shows.

The station will continue broadcasting throughout the summer and anyone who has been attending classes at The Ark on Thursdays is welcome to apply to Darren Holmes for broadcasting slots during the coming weeks.

The latest broadcasting schedule includes two new slots on Mondays – a current affairs programme hosted by The Ark's chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker, and assistant, Scott Waller – from 7-8pm; and Mr and Mrs – banter about family life and fun music choices hosted by Andrea and studio facilitator, Roly Parker - from 8-9pm.

The Tuesday timetable includes Dave and Darren's show, with Dave Soper and Darren Holmes, about community and voluntary organisation issues in Wokingham from 1-2pm.

Dating scheme gets under way

The Ark's collaborative project to improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities has been launched with a competition for potential service users to name the organisation and design a logo.

Flyers advertising the services have been sent to people throughout east Berkshire and Wokingham, and meetings have been held by the team which will roll out the new scheme.

The Ark together with the NHS's East Berkshire Community Teams for People with Learning Disabilities and Wokingham's Community Team for People with a Learning Disability were awarded £50,000 for the project by the NHS earlier this year.

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 run accessible teaching sessions to improve knowledge of sexual health and relationship skills.

CHALLENGE 500

Radio marathon proves huge success

Thousands of pounds have now been raised through the Challenge 500 appeal.

But as the Challenge entered the second half of the year, it was still a very long way off the target of having 500 individuals, groups or businesses raise £500 each. In fact, a very long way.

The biggest event so far has been the hugely successful 100 Hour **Broadcasting Marathon** held in the Radio Marmalade studio at The Ark from 10am on May 30 until 2pm on June 3.

The event involved more than 50 DJs and has netted about £2,000 with more than 10% of it coming from one Ark user plus a donation of £500 from Voipfone, a leading provider of internet telephone services which recently installed The Ark's new phone system.

The marathon broadcast on www.radiomarmalade.org.uk attracted more than 650 listeners from 16 different countries.

And no one enjoyed it more than the 40 DJs who have



been honing their skills at The Ark's Community and Communication and DJ courses, some of whom now have their own weekly radio shows and DJ at Club Marmalade.

"It has been exhausting but rewarding. It is good to be able to give something back for a change," said Karmenie Ashley who has attended classes and volunteered at The Ark

for five years. I am especially pleased that I have raised more than £250 in sponsorship."

Diary Dates

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



AIM Forum social and meeting:
Tuesday, July 26, 5-8pm, Crooked Billet, Wokingham.

Girlie night at The Ark: Friday, July 29, 6-10pm.

Next term starts: September - date TBC.

Club Marmalade at Taboo, Bracknell: September 25, October 30, November 27, 7pm-late.

And fellow learner and volunteer at The Ark, Trevor Rowden (pictured above right with Alan Dale, Lorretta Brookes and Graeme Lodge), said: "It is an experience just to be on the radio. We want to thank everyone for their support."

While the night shifts were mainly manned by Darren Holmes, a

project leader at The Ark, and Roly Parker, The Ark's studio facilitator, chief executive, Andrea McCombie-Parker, did her bit - including a graveyard shift - as did trustees Richard Knight and Paul Bidwell.



Keen DJ and Ark course attendee, Graeme Lodge, did a stint every day and, having been the first on air, had the pleasure of signing off on behalf of everyone involved at the end of the 100 hours. Darren commented: "It has been fantastic. The group has done really well."

The day after the marathon ended, Stewart McDougall, who has been attending The Ark since the start of this year and has his own radio show, on Wednesday afternoons, raised £200 from a sponsored **wheelchair push**.

Stewart, 20, was pushed over a distance of 5km along The Long Walk in Windsor Great Park, by his sister, Cassandra, (pictured left) and her boyfriend, Matt Clissitt.

"It was a lovely sunny day and we saw some deer along the way and other animal which made it really interesting. We all enjoyed it and I am pleased with what we raised." Before the month was out Richard Knight was on his bike in a bid to raise more funds for The Ark by taking part in the **Wokingham Bikeathon**.

"Six of us did the 35 mile ride round the streets of Wokingham and two or three did it for Challenge 500," he said. "We all completed the ride in just over three hours including a couple of stops. The weather made the ride tougher being the hottest day for five years. I think we were all glad to see the finishing line as the heat was beginning to get to us." The team raised £105.

Meanwhile Scott Waller, a volunteer at The Ark, now hopes to raise £2000 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.

"I think I have managed to get companies to sponsor the cost of hiring the theatre which is a big help," said Scott who has raised an additional £200 for The Ark by getting friends and relatives to sponsor her to put on the show. The Ark hopes more people will take up Challenge 500 and either organise an event of their own or get sponsored for taking part in something else. Call or email The Ark office to tell us your plans and discuss how we can help.



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