

TK Report

Report for Witnesham Parish Meeting – 17th April from Tina Prince, Hope Centre Service Manager.

Good evening from everyone at The Hope Centre - we would like to extend our warmest wishes and greetings to you. I am sorry that I am not able to attend in person this evening.

The last 12 months have been extremely busy for us as we remain fully occupied with 11 residents and a waiting list of new women that would like to benefit from the support and services that we can offer to them. Without all of your generous support so far this year, as well as the prayers that you say for us, we would not have been able to achieve everything that we have accomplished so far. From the bottom of our hearts, we would like to say thank you very much to all of you. Every donation, every prayer and all of the support we have received from our wonderful local community has made such a difference to us and has positively impacted our residents.

The current age range of our residents is from 22 years old to 57 years old. All of the residents communicate well amongst themselves and despite the varying age groups, they get on well together and engage in communal activities.

We are delighted to announce that the old barn has now been demolished and we would like to thank everyone that contributed financially to enable this to happen. It is amazing how much additional space this has provided us with. We are currently working with an architect to work on the most cost effective way to build the five new rooms, provide additional staff office space and to extend the current communal kitchen and lounge in Kingfisher block. The five new rooms will be designed to offer more independent living for our residents, prior to them moving onto their own tenancies. There will be a clear pathway for a resident when they move in to when they are able to obtain external tenancies. When a resident first moves in they require a lot of support from the team and they share all of the communal facilities together. These residents would therefore be housed in the existing Kingfisher and Nightingale Blocks and when they have demonstrated positive outcomes in their time with us and they are ready to start bidding for properties of their own, they will move into one of the new rooms, which will offer them more independence, with their own kitchen and living space but with the security of having the staff team as a back up for any support requirements that they might have before becoming fully independent. We are very excited about this next phase of our development and we

believe that having a clear pathway for our women through their TK experience, will offer encouragement and hope for all concerned.

It goes without saying that our plans to progress the services that we currently offer do need financial backing and investment and we would like to make another appeal to all of our supporters for any help that you can provide us with to enable us to progress these plans into action. With the additional services that we already provide by offering a 7 day service, we do operate at a small deficit each month and therefore every financial donation we receive from the community enables us to continue our valuable and necessary work in supporting the vulnerable women in our community. We are incredibly grateful for all the donations we have received so far and would like to thank you for these, especially in these difficult financial times.

We have had a couple of staff changes in the last couple of months, with Emma, Our Senior Support Worker moving onto a different challenge at the end of February. Emma had been involved with The Hope Centre from when we first opened and was a very valued member of the team. She is greatly missed by the staff team and the residents. We have been blessed with the arrival of a new support worker, Helen who started with us last week and she brings a wealth of relevant experience with her. Helen has made a very positive impact to the team and residents and she is also a trained counsellor and trainer for The Freedom Programme, which going forward Helen will be able to offer The Freedom Programme on either a one to one basis with our residents or in a group setting. This is another service that we are delighted to be able to offer to our residents.

In the first quarter of this year, we have had another two residents successfully move on into their own independent tenancies after both ladies spent just over a year with us. It was wonderful to see the transformation of both of these ladies from how they were when they joined us to how confident and independent they had become when they left us. One of the ladies described her time with us and the support she received from us as "life-saving and amazing" and she thanked us for "transforming her life into an amazing new adventure". We are always delighted to see our residents move on in such a positive manner and these successful outcomes help to encourage our other residents that might be experiencing difficult times.

Over the last couple of months, we have also been able to reunite one of our residents with several members of her family that she had not had any contact with for over 10 years. This resident is unfortunately in very poor health and has recently

received a terminal diagnosis and it was really important for us to try to trace her family members so that they had the opportunity to see her and build some bridges. This has been very successful and it was very heart warming to witness some of these reunions, to the extent that she will be moving back in her with Mother shortly for what will be her final weeks. We wish them all well and we will continue to support this resident and her family as we all go through the very tough and emotional next few weeks together.

The number of referrals for women that we have been receiving each month has remained at a consistently high level. Many of these referrals are for varying levels of domestic abuse, either from their partners or from other family members, including their own parents. As a staff team we have been working hard with these residents to support them with their trauma, both onsite and off-site by sign-posting them to other external agencies that can also help to support them. We have also noticed that the average age of the referrals that we have received has become younger and younger, which is a very sad reflection of the society that we now live in. We have had four residents move in since January who are in their early twenties. The number of referrals that we have received for women with extremely complex mental health needs has also increased dramatically this year. With so many funding cuts across so many external services, there is an increasing number of vulnerable women that are not being supported with their needs in the community. We are only able to offer support to a fraction of the number of vulnerable women that need the support that we can offer.

We have recently made some further adaptations for our resident in a wheelchair, extending the pathways to enable her to have better access with her wheelchair and we have built a new fire exit route for her which goes directly from the back of her room. This provides more security for her and is helping with her rehabilitation. This resident has recently been fitted for a prosthetic leg and she is building up her strength on a daily basis in order to make full use of it and improve her mobility and confidence.

Winter activities at The Hope Centre have mainly been indoors due to the weather and have included various baking sessions, both by staff and volunteers, bread making activities, communal meal planning and cooking and various art inspired activities. We are blessed to have Josie in our team who leads all of the art based activities. We also have a walking group which was set up by another member of

our team, Trina, who actively encourages the residents to enjoy and appreciate the beautiful countryside that we are fortunate to be surrounded by. The weather has not been kind lately but as we move forward more into Spring, there will be more walks planned and more outdoor activities to encourage the residents to take part in more communal activities.

Our vegetable/flower garden has started to bloom with spring flowers and we look forward to continuing to improve our garden, with the help of Leanne, our gardener and our residents that enjoy gardening. The residents find it very therapeutic to plant something and watch it blossom as they themselves blossom over their time with us.

The staff team are continuing to work at weekends on a rota basis, which has proved to be incredibly popular with the residents and also very productive. Communal meals are often cooked at the weekends for the residents as well as lots of home baking! This encourages the ladies to learn new skills in a relaxed environment and promotes life skills for their futures after The Hope Centre. Sharing a meal together is enjoyable and is inclusive for all of the residents. The atmosphere at the weekends is very different from the hustle and bustle of week days and a lot of emotional support is given over the weekend that the residents don't always realize is happening. Other weekend activities include art projects, quiz afternoons, pamper sessions and movies. The 7 day a week support has been very beneficial for residents and staff alike.

All of our external lighting has been upgraded over the winter and this has much improved the dark winter nights for the residents. The solar panels are in full operation, which is helping us to reduce our energy costs and carbon footprint. We are continually striving to become more self sufficient and to make use of the natural resources around us.

We recently made an appeal on Facebook for some toiletries for our residents, as often residents arrive with no personal possessions and a welcome pack of essential toiletries helps them to settle in over their first few days. Thank you so much to everyone that responded to our appeal - our residents are very grateful for the love and support that the local community have shown to them.

We also recently made an appeal in the local newspaper for a second hand high sided vehicle to allow us to access The Hope Centre in all weathers. From October 2023 until February 2024, Wash Lane flooded an incredible 16 times! This seriously

hampered our work as there were days when we were unable to access the lane to get to the centre and other days when we were flooded in and were not able to support our residents with their external appointments. This is very disruptive for all concerned and leads to high amounts of frustration amongst the team and the residents as we feel we are letting the residents down. An old second hand high sided vehicle would ensure that this did not happen again and we would be able to fully support our residents, no matter what the weather. We are still appealing for a vehicle of this type, so if anyone is able to offer us any financial assistance in order to help us to buy one, or if they have one that we could have, we would be eternally grateful.

Thank you all once again for helping to support us and enable us to continue our vital work with our vulnerable women.

If anyone wants to get in touch then my email address is tina.prince@talithakoum.org.uk and our contact number is 01473 354200.

Many apologies again for not being able to attend this evening.

Tina Prince

Hope Centre Service Manager.