

High Flyers

From time to time, All Saints' Church's congregation supports High Flyers as their 'Charity of the Month'. Martin went to Wombourne recently to find out more about the charity.



Pegasus House.

Just before Christmas 2018, Martin was invited to High Flyers at Pegasus House in Wombourne, where he met Sheila Baker, who runs the group. (Pegasus was chosen to be the symbol for the house - as he too was a 'high flyer'!)

The premises used to be a Mencap residential home, but High Flyers have altered it considerably to accommodate their activities.



Volunteers in the kitchen- three of whom are parents of members.

Walls have been knocked through to allow adjoining rooms to be joined together. One such arrangement has helped create a large, fully-adapted kitchen area which previously was only quite small. The enlarged space means all work surfaces are accessible to members to help prepare their own food, thereby developing their culinary skills - it is also accessible for wheelchairs.

The dining room walls have been decorated in dynamic grey and white stripes by one of the members, with help from the centre's support staff. The idea is to give members lots of different experiences and thereby provide opportunities for them to excel.



The computer room.

In the computer room, there is a mix of laptop and static computers that have **Makaton** loaded onto them - Makaton is a simple sign language designed to help people who have learning difficulties to communicate. It uses **signs** and symbols, with speech.

For a video on the Makaton language see:

<https://wetalkmakaton.org/#sign-of-the-week>

The former kitchen is now a big Art Room. One group recently did a study based on images only viewable using microscopes, drawing details of insects, foliage and flowers. Most of the members had never seen a microscope before, so it is something very unusual and different.



The Quiet Room

The Purple (or Quiet Room) is available as a quiet space to retire to when required. A lot of group members have autism and can experience 'sensory overload' so need somewhere quiet to retreat to

Also the room has a set of puppets, enabling members to practice communication using signing - you can insert your hands into the puppets' hands to do the signing.



The Purple (or Quiet Room) has a set of puppets.

On arrival in the morning, members will choose a room in which they feel comfortable – some don't like it too noisy or too crowded. Then they choose from a variety of activities on the centre's programme for the day.



The Red Room is used for music.

The Red Room is used for singing and music sessions.

The Sensory Room contains a waterbed, infinity tubes, a comfy suspended wicker chair and lighting projections. This is a room where members can go to de-stress or experience sensory stimulation depending upon the equipment use.



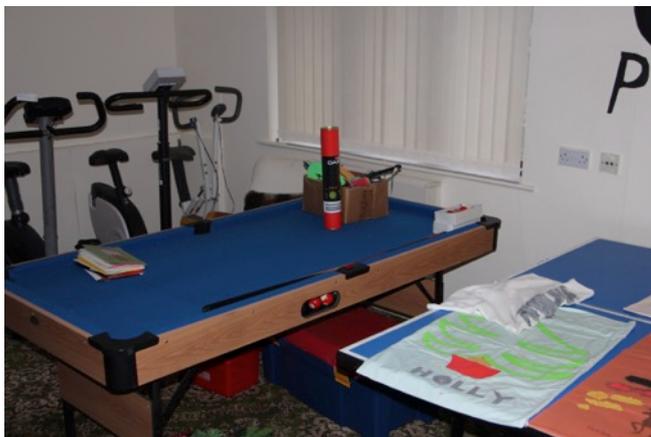
The suspended wicker chair in the Sensory Room.



Infinity tubes in the Sensory Room change colour.



The water bed in the Sensory Room.



The Games and Fitness Room.

The centre also has a games and fitness room, with snooker tables and fitness cycles - and even a magnetic darts board.

High Flyers has its own mini-business called **'High Flyers Gadgets'**. The gadgets are small items that make life easier for those with physical problems and the elderly. They include devices to open tin cans and bottles, devices for picking up objects, and bath mats to stop you slipping in the bath. Members do different jobs in the business: some parcel items, some sort out the money, and some take telephone orders.



Jacqui Beattie in her office.

Sheila's deputy Jacqui Beattie showed other items of stock they sell, including 'grippers', walking sticks, back-scrubbers, magnifying glasses, tap-turners, and large-faced clocks.

You can get in touch with the team, who meet on Fridays, at highflyersgadgets121@hotmail.com Tel: 01902 898363; 17 Elder Grove Wombourne Wolverhampton WV5 0EN.

OUTSIDE

Outside there are raised beds for gardening, a trampoline, a greenhouse; a shed with adapted bikes; and a woodshed with woodworking equipment.

Alas currently the centre has no one to lead the woodworking activity and are actively looking for someone – they would not have to supervise the members, because High Flyers' staff undertake that.



Raised beds outside for growing vegetables, which are cooked to make meals for the members.



The sensory garden.



The greenhouse.

BACKGROUND TO THE HIGH FLYERS STORY

Sheila gave Martin an insight into how High Flyers first came into being ten years ago, and explained some of the issues they currently face.

BEGINNINGS

“High Flyers was started because day centres for adults with special needs were closing down. I sat on various groups as a parent, aware of what was being said by Social Services.

“I was very anxious because they were telling us not to worry because the market would ‘kick in’ and ‘something would be provided’ instead. It set off alarm bells because I couldn’t see how you could do this well, and make a profit.

“There was nothing else in the area, so High Flyers began ten years ago with four members, in a room at the Memorial Hall at the United Reformed Church in Mill Lane, Wombourne. Now there are sixty members.

“The difficulty we have is that the range of learning disability is huge. There are those who are non-verbal, doubly incontinent, and need complete care in every possible way.

“Then there are those who would appear quite OK, but have unseen difficulties. All of their needs need to be accommodated in this one building, so having many different rooms helps.

“Quite a lot of the members have additional needs such as epilepsy; some have mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder as well.

“There are some that can manage in a small group setting; and some that need one-to-one contact. We want to give everyone the opportunity to do all our activities and thereby make our centre really inclusive.

FUNDING ISSUES

“Adults with learning disabilities are allocated funding following an assessment of their needs. These funds are to enable them to access services. However, the funds given do not cover all the costs of what we provide or improvements needed to the building so we have to undertake additional fundraising. For example our horse-riding activity costs £20 per person per session.

“If people come as a small group, and there is a 3-to-1 staff ratio we’re currently covering their care costs; but if it’s 1-to-1 we’re not even covering this cost - and the rates we charge for our services haven’t gone up in 10 years.

EVIDENCING IMPROVEMENT

“Every year our members are reassessed by social services and as a consequence the amount that they are prepared to fund may change.

“We have to demonstrate improvements and developments and set targets for our members.

“Social Services can come in at any time in addition to their annual reviews.

“Education is part of our ethos anyway, and we always try and provide learning opportunities in whatever we do, although this

isn't in a formal sit-down lesson context.

“Yet the way things are developing, we will need to be able to demonstrate progress in everything we do to obtain continued funding. Yet these are adults, and as such their rate of development has slowed drastically.

STAFF

“We have 20 paid full and part time staff. Our turnover of staff and volunteers is very low – we still have volunteers who have been with us from the very beginning.

‘We don't employ agency staff, as our members need consistency. All our members have agreed plans and it's hard for a new face to come in and grasp instantly all of what's required with that person. It must be terrifying if you have communication difficulties to be confronted with someone who doesn't understand your issues.

REWARDS

“Running High Flyers is a real challenge and I frequently get frustrated with the bureaucracy, but when you see how much the members benefit it's all worthwhile. Our members want to show you things; they are constantly discovering and achieving things. On a bad day I go and look at our photos of the members happily enjoying the different activities they take part in, and it encourages me to keep going.

TIMETABLE

“We offer horseriding 2 days a week (when people go to the horseriding they can do farm skills instead).

“Also offered gardening, cooking, drama, dance, life skills, swimming, music, arts and crafts, carriage riding for those who can't get out of a wheelchair; and computer skills.

“Golf is offered too – members go to the Mark Butler Academy in Sandyfields Road (on the way from Sedgley to The Straits); and we have cycle training with adapted bikes.

“Sainsburys Wombourne donates to High Flyers flowers that have reached their sell-by date, that would normally be binned. Members use them to make arrangements that are taken to nearby community venues.

HOLIDAYS

“High Flyers goes to Butlins every year for their holidays, giving carers 5 days’ much needed respite.

TRANSPORT

“We don’t offer transport to get members to and from the centre; this would involve doing multiple pickups and keeping people on buses for hours. We just can’t undertake this as we have people travelling from as far afield as Halesowen and Amblecote.

“Now social services departments are saying that they want people to access a service that is near to them. And some specify it must be the cheapest available. That causes great problems, particularly if members have been here a long time and they are settled and happy.

“However we do have 3 minibuses that take members out during the day.

FUNDRAISING

“All the work we’ve done to the building has been done through fundraising efforts.

“We’re very grateful to All Saints’ for all the money they’ve raised for us. I hope this article will show what we’ve done and continue to do with it. People are very welcome to come and visit, they only have to give me a ring.

“If we get a small group who want to come and see us, our members could cook for them and arrange hosts and hostesses.

PRIDE IN ACHIEVEMENT

“Our members will not be able to do many of the things most people take for granted in life, so they do need activities that give them a sense of achievement and make them feel valued and special as individuals.

“This certainly applies to horse riding; also to golf where our members have competed in tournaments. These are activities which very many people never experience anyway - and our members get a lot of satisfaction doing them.

Martin Jones.

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