

## Centre Manager's Report July 2017

Visits to the Centre during June increased by 63% on the same period last year. Summer months are traditionally a time when we take a break from running groups and classes due to many Centre Users being on holiday, however this year we have broken from tradition and we have some of our groups, such as Knit and Natter and the Art group, running throughout the summer due to popular demand. During the last couple of months we have hosted a range of events by organisations such as Key, Carr Gomm and NHS Complex Care Panel. We were delighted to welcome a delegation of visitors from Sight Action, a charity that supports blind and partially sighted people living in Inverness for a tour of the Centre and a discussion with some of our partner organisations. Sight Action are considering developing their own Sensory Centre and are keen to find out more about why our Centre is proving to be so successful.

We delivered several fundraising social events including “Dine in the Dark” at the Park Hotel. This unique event was led by our Centre User fundraising group and in addition to generating funding it provided great publicity for the Centre and raised awareness about the sensory impaired community. Our pop-up shop in La Porte precinct, Grangemouth proved to be another hit, increasing our profits from last years shop, we raised a total of £2121. Not only did this event top the amount of money raised last year, it was supported by staff from Centre partner organisations working together with centre staff and volunteers. A “thank-you” lunch and celebration event took place on 26 July to acknowledge the hard work and support shown by everyone to make this event so successful.

FVSC was chosen as the venue to launch the Neatebox “Welcome” app on 27 July. Neatebox showcased the features of their innovative Welcome app to a group of people with disabilities here at the Centre and also at the Falkirk Wheel. This launch will continue to attract

publicity to highlight ways that technology can be used to help people with physical disabilities and “hidden” disabilities. FVSC is delighted to be amongst the first organisations in the UK to be a part of this exciting development.

### **Sensory Garden Refurbishment**

Due to a delay in the match-funding process we are holding back from commencing a full scale overhaul of the garden. We should receive a decision on the match funding in October. In the meantime we are doing some preparatory work in the garden and we have the assistance of Falkirk Community Payback team to support us with labouring and heavy pruning work. We continue to be optimistic that we will be able to transform our sensory garden and provide all the different aspects our centre users have suggested – a reflective memorial space with a water feature, interactive musical instruments, an interactive space for children, bright new surfaces and covered seating areas.

We are working with local community artist Brendan Gallagher to help us put together a collaborative art work for our revitalised Sensory Garden. Centre Users have produced a design based on individual clay tiles. The theme for the design is “Garden”. Our tile workshops for Centre Users have proven to be extremely popular. The focal, tactile artwork will be unveiled at event to mark the opening of the newly refurbished garden later in the year. The tile project has been sponsored by Kiran’s Trust, Camelon community enterprises and Centre User Janette Scott.

### **Publicity**

During the summer holiday period our focus has been on upcoming events and new group activities. Coverage has continued to come in for David Black’s Self-Defence classes with features on RNIB Connect Radio and in the Stirling Observer, Alloa Advertiser and Falkirk Herald all promoting the new class starting 4<sup>th</sup> August.

The charity shop drew a lot of social media attention with almost 6000 people engaging with our posts in the last month (June 24<sup>th</sup> – July 24<sup>th</sup>) and a reach of 12,000 people.

The website continues to be developed with the addition of a new contact page making it easier for people to get in touch with the Centre.

We are averaging around 2000 visits to the website each month but would like to see this rise as people begin to rely more on our content.

We are always seeking new ways to promote the Centre and work with partners. We have collaborated with Forth Environment Link on press for our first ever pop-up restaurant on the evening of 21 September. We are working closely with TSB to maximise the publicity regarding our Centre refurbishment.

We are continuing to develop our relationship with The Howgate shopping centre with the potential of increasing FVSC presence in town. We will be supporting literacy week during September by arranging for a BSL interpreter to interpret storytelling sessions in the Howgate to make them accessible for deaf families and to raise awareness of deafness.

We have recently linked up with Solicitors for Older People Scotland (SOPS), an umbrella organisation who are asking their member Solicitors to offer a 10 per cent discount to Centre Users who may need to use their services for things such as Will writing or power of attorney agreements. We will be providing sensory awareness training for SOPS staff in the near future.

We visited St Columba's Hospice earlier this month to exchange ideas on fundraising, volunteering and customer care. Staff from the Hospice are planning to come and visit FVSC as part of a reciprocal arrangement.

### **Centre Refurbishment**

Centre refurbishment work is now underway. We have new furnishings in our waiting area and comfortable new seating in Hall 1. Café refurbishment will be completed by Monday 31 July and will include new flooring and lighting and acoustic ceiling tiles. Our halls, toilets and corridors are being given a fresh coat of paint by our volunteers from Falkirk TSB branch. This project is being led by Mitie and involves support from Lloyds TSB, Go Green and Arthur McKay. A donation from Falkirk Ladies Circle is being used to upgrade café furnishings.

## **Volunteering**

We currently have 42 active volunteers registered with the Centre and engaged in variety of different roles. Some examples include:

The Pop up shop which had 54 volunteer slots (some people covered more than one slot) these included Centre volunteers and volunteers from Real Jobs Falkirk, Action Group, DWP, Asda community champion.

We are in the early stages of recruiting 6 new volunteers with 3 more in very early stages. We have a young volunteer on placement over the summer helping with administration.

There are some gaps in volunteering experience relating to garden work and ad-hoc support for events/promotional activities

Volunteers have recently provided much appreciated support for:

- Charity shop
- Mindbuzz event for Action on Hearing Loss
- Centre refurbishment
- Garden tile painting session
- Café sessions to cover Sara's annual leave

Upcoming events which will require volunteers:

- Signing elves/sign stories/NDCS fun day/cataloguing of dress donations/winter fayre/CVS older persons day/Afternoon tea and fashion show/Charities Day/Dinner Dance

The Centre has now registered with Clackmannan Third Sector Interface to promote our volunteer opportunities. We are also putting together some nominations for the forthcoming Stirlingshire Volunteer Awards

Our Volunteer Friendly Award portfolio has been reviewed and submitted to CVS for verification.

### **Up & Coming Events:**

- Sunday 6 August: 1 – 5pm Malvina's Garden Party. Malvina will be opening her award winning garden in Avonbridge to the public.

Tea, coffee, homebaking and a tombola will be on offer. Transport available from the Sensory Centre

- Thursday 14 September: 11:30 -1pm Open meeting Invitation to come along and find out more about the Centre. Information talks on the theme of technology from RNIB, Action on Hearing Loss, NHS FV and Neatebox
- Thursday 21 September: 6pm – 9pm Pop up evening restaurant delivered in partnership with Forth Environment Link and featuring home cooked food made with local seasonal produce
- Sunday 8 October: 1pm – 4pm Afternoon Tea (Clive Ramsay) and Fashion Show (Libbys of Larbert and Culture Clothing) Tickets on sale shortly £15
- Saturday 18 November – Dine and Disco, Park Hotel Falkirk

**Braveheart Walks** – Braveheart are offering a regular programme of supported walks. Volunteers are on hand to provide guided support for blind, partially sighted people and deaf people. Please notify the Centre in advance if you are planning to take part and require support. The next walk takes place on Friday 25 August at 1:30. The route will be along the canal bank at Polmont.

For up-to-date information on all our groups, classes and activities please visit our website [www.forthvalleysensorycentre.org/whats-on-at-fvsc/](http://www.forthvalleysensorycentre.org/whats-on-at-fvsc/)

*Report prepared by Jacquie Winning, Centre Manager, 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017*

