

Celebrating communities at the Storyhouse Great Get Together



Communities from across Cheshire West and Chester came together in a display of unity during June, at the Great Get Together festival at Storyhouse in Chester.

During the event, part of a national initiative in memory of Jo Cox MP, Storyhouse hosted communities from across the borough in a celebration of all that we have in common.

The free programme offered arts and crafts, performances, creative workshops, film and a marketplace. Workshops included pyrography, turning memories into art, knitting cannula sleeves, dementia friendly clay workshops, LEGO building and ukulele jams.

Wellbeing was at the heart of the programme with Tai Chi sessions, group led life coaching and ballet classes designed for older people.

“ Is there any better way to celebrate all that we have in common than by sharing the things that give us joy?

Here in Cheshire West and Chester, we were lucky enough to have an entire programme of community events designed to do just that – in the form of the Great Get Together at Storyhouse in Chester. It was great to see so many older members of our community leading activities, volunteering or just coming along to have some fun and sample new experiences in friendly company. Loneliness and social isolation are still a major problem in the UK so events like this really help keep the spotlight on Jo Cox's inspirational vision that we have more in common than that which divides us. This was the

third festival of its kind to be held at Storyhouse, and a wonderful opportunity for us to highlight the work we are doing at Brightlife to help turn Cheshire West and Chester into an Age-friendly borough. With this in mind, we are taking the opportunity in this newsletter to celebrate some more of the fantastic Brightlife-funded projects that are helping to make Cheshire West and Chester a great place to grow older. We hope that you enjoy reading about them as much as we have enjoyed helping them to grow.

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Chris McClelland
Head of Brightlife



Growing connections with Grozone

Growing Connections is a Brightlife-funded project designed to encourage and support people aged over 50 to enjoy the outdoors, make new friends, and rediscover a love of gardening.

The project is hosted at Grozone's Community Garden: a horticultural and wildlife project in Northwich.

"Growing Connections is about getting people of all ages together to do healthy activities that make them feel better," says development officer Caroline Rose. "We're quite flexible in the activities we do, it can be anything from crafts to growing food to cooking. It does everyone so much good in a myriad of ways – the older ones share their knowledge and skills with the younger ones. It's very enriching." Someone who has found a sense of purpose with Growing Connections is retired service technician Roy Pearce (69)

from Wincham. After his wife of 46 years died, he found himself at a loose end and was feeling quite low. His worried family found out about Grozone so he decided to give it a go. "I do a bit of everything there, from weeding and picking fruit to helping people with learning difficulties," he says. "It's widened my friendship group, and while I'm there, I'm not missing my wife. They look at me like a father figure and it makes me feel useful... I get as much out of them as they get out of me." The project is positive for everyone involved as it adds structure, helps improve self-esteem and allows people to feel a part of a community – all with the added benefit of being out in the fresh air. "It fills gaps that are needed," Caroline explains. "I've always had a fear of being stuck inside because of ill health when I'm older. That's why I wanted this



opportunity to be available and I hope it still will be for me when the time comes!" Thanks to Brightlife funding, Growing Connections has been able to help more than 30 people, all of whom have gone on to join other Grozone projects to further develop and share their skills, giving them a real and lasting sense of purpose. For more information on Grozone please contact Caroline Rose on 07500104691 or caroline.rose@groundwork.org.uk.

Mentoring project to help young mothers



A pioneering mentoring programme is looking for women over 50 to help younger mums who may have mental health issues or are experiencing family breakdowns.

Bright Stars, run by the charity Motherwell Cheshire, encourages

experienced mums to share their skills and knowledge with those who feel lonely and isolated.

Winsford mother-of-three Kate Blakemore came up with the idea for Bright Stars after experiencing her own difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth.

"We help lots of women on their motherhood journey," she says. "Many haven't got their own mothers around to support them.

It's a real win-win because some of the older women are experiencing things like empty nest syndrome

and it helps them too."

The mentoring is designed to be long-term, with relationships lasting over a couple of years so that trust is built up and a deep relationship forms that can be life-changing for both women.

Mentors receive coaching, training and safeguarding guidance which enables them to know how to handle some of the challenges they may face.

Any mature mums interested in becoming mentors can email hr@motherwellcheshirecio.com.

Putting older people centre stage

Brightlights is a pioneering acting group for the over 50s which meets weekly at Neston Theatre Arts.

Run by Samantha Giblin, the Artistic Director of the Little Actors Theatre Company, along with director Mike Lockley, the group was launched in early 2018. According to Mike, the value of participating in the arts shouldn't be underestimated. "Acting is especially good for older people as learning lines has huge benefits for memory while the sense of achievement in putting on a play really helps to build confidence and self esteem," he says.

Founder member David Tidbury (66) from Ellesmere Port already had acting experience when he saw an advert for the project so he thought it would be fun to try it again. "It's a great social activity and I've made some good friends," he says. "For those two hours I'm here, it's an escape and I can forget about my troubles. And it gave me a real lift when we got so many nominations for our last performance."

Samantha stresses that members don't have to be aspiring actors: other ways to be involved include stage management, lighting, sound and producing.



Pictured above: Little Actors Theatre Group

Arthur Ronald (83) from Neston was a complete novice to acting when he joined and found he enjoyed the sense of community.

"It's great to be with a group of people that all have a joint venture with an end goal," he said. "It's such a constructive and absorbing activity to be a part of."

Arthur says it's also widened his horizons as he now chaperones those involved in youth theatre and really enjoys spending time with a different generation.

"It's so enriching being involved in a drama – it helps work your brain

and it leads you to unexpected avenues," he explained. "You learn so much about different things which can only be a good thing."

Members, who range in age from mid-50s to mid-80s, wrote a play called 'The Cruise' which they performed at a the Leverhulme Drama Festival at the Gladstone Theatre in Port Sunlight, and which received five nominations and the award for Best Presentation.

For more details about Brightlights Theatre, contact 0151 336 4302 or visit their website at www.littleactorstheatre.com.

Save the dates

You won't want to miss these two important events coming soon!

Join Brightlife at Chester Pride to show your support of LGBT+ people during August, then look out for lots of activities in the borough to celebrate Silver Sunday in October.

Chester Pride

Saturday 10th August



Silver Sunday

Sunday 6th October



Changing the record for people with dementia



Of all the places you might expect to find dementia support, a record store is probably not the first that springs to mind. But that's exactly where Bright Memories, a Brightlife-funded project that helps people living with dementia and their carers, has launched its latest social group. The weekly group, held at the Electric Church café and record store in Winsford, enables people with dementia to continue to enjoy doing the things they love whilst also giving their

carers an opportunity to socialise and unwind. The group was inspired by a customer called Carl who had visited the Electric Church with his daughter. Carl had been diagnosed three years previously with early-onset Alzheimer's and had become increasingly withdrawn. However, when Carl's daughter brought him to the record store she noticed a sudden change in his mood – he became much livelier and was chatting away to everyone. The old records and friendly atmosphere in

the store were clearly just what life-long music fan Carl needed to begin to enjoy life again.

The store and café owner, Jimi, a former carer, saw the potential for his café to help others like Carl, so he contacted Bright Memories to offer them the use of his store for a weekly group. Now Carl and his wife Helen attend the group regularly to meet with other people in a similar position. Carl enjoys listening to the music he loves, while Helen has made some supportive friendships with other carers.

Bright Memories is delivered by a partnership comprising Cheshire Warrington and Carers Trust, Alzheimer's Society and Age UK Cheshire. In addition to social groups for those with dementia and their carers, the programme also offers outdoor and arts-based activities and training and consultancy for organisations who want to become more dementia friendly. To find out more about Bright Memories, please call 0300 102 0008 or email brightmemories@cheshireandwarringtoncarers.org.

This newsletter is also available in large print. Call 01606 884444 to request a copy.



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