

THE WEE BLETHER



SEPTEMBER EDITION



Challenging Changes

The last three months have seen some big changes at BHL. Many of you will be aware of some of them but many will not know all that has been happening, so I'd like to take this opportunity to put you all in the picture.

Graeme, our Manager, left our service at the end of May. He had achieved a huge amount for us in the years that he was here. He raised funds energetically and always had visions of how BHL could expand its much needed contribution to the support of people affected by mental health problems. In the 4 years he was here, BHL almost doubled in size. We had a going away party for Graeme on 31 May and many of you either came to that, wrote to Graeme or spoke to him on other occasions. I know he was touched by all you said to him. We wish him the very best for the future.

Once we knew Graeme was leaving, we had to think seriously about what to do. The freezing of Highland Council's grant to us for the last 3 years, and now its reduction by 5% for this year and next, has reduced our income compared to our costs. Other funding has been hard to find as almost the whole voluntary sector is in a similarly tight position and the grant-making bodies have been overwhelmed. We decided that we could not really afford to replace Graeme as Manager but we also questioned whether we were organising ourselves in the most effective way, anyway. Did we really have to have a Manager or could we divide up the Manager's functions amongst our extremely able staff? In this time of continuing financial pressure, every organisation has to look at how it can reduce management costs whilst maintaining frontline services.

We have discussed the options with staff and in the Management Group in detail. We have decided not to fill the Manager's post but to divide the functions which Graeme, and Judy before him, carried out amongst the team. So, for example, one person will take the lead on maintaining our records and information systems and another on everything to do with managing our premises. The team will be more self-managing, deciding things at regular team meetings. Directors and other members of the Management Group will become more involved in some of the day-to-day decision-making and the support of our staff.

We have been delighted with the way all of our team have taken on this challenge. It is extra work for them and we appreciate this and their willingness to take it on. We will review and assess the success of the changes after 6 months. This is a challenge but it is also an opportunity for people to develop in their roles and the early signs are that it is bringing advantages. But there is no denying that the size of our staff group has fallen and the levels of our activities have not. This does create pressures and I do ask for your understanding of this. We do not want the quality of our work to reduce in any way. If you should have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me or any of our staff team. Best wishes to you all. David Stallard



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Inverness

From the end of May it has been full steam ahead as Debbie Sam, Heather, Sally and Yvonne get used to the new challenges without a manager. Working closely together with the Directors and management Group it all seems to be going well so far.



Lots of changes from office layout, working hours to appointment systems for everyone to get used to. Not just the staff but volunteers and friends alike. It was decided that Debbie and Heather would split the Inverness Face to Face friendships, each taking on eight new friendships along with their current managed matches.

Due to the fact that Debbie and Heather work part time it is now easier to work an appointment system to see everyone. The appointment system means that people are not disappointed, after climbing the dreaded stairs, to find that neither Debbie or Heather are in. If you intend to pop in please give the office a call first to avoid disappointment and to ensure you get that cuppa and chat.

Sam will be here on her usual days to take messages, make appointments and for you to claim expenses. A letter was sent out to everyone explaining that expenses over £20 will now only be paid by cheque and will be sent out to you by post. Expenses under £20 will be paid in cash but again please give the office a call just to ensure there will be someone in the office to pay you.

So as you can see it is all change and we hope you can bear with us while we settle in to the new systems.



Office Hours

Inverness

Mon 09:00-17:00 Sam & Debbie
Tues 09.00-17:00 Heather (Phone cover)
Wed 10.00-16:00 Sam
Thurs 09.00-16:30 Sam & Debbie

Distance

Mon 09.00-17.00 Sally & Heather
Tues 09.00-17.00 Sally & Yvonne
Wed 09.00-17.00 Yvonne & Heather
Thurs 09.00-17.00 Sally & Yvonne
Friday 09.00-17.00 Sally

Nairn

Tues 09.00-17.00 Heather
Thurs 09.00-17.00 Heather

In event of staff being at meetings or on holiday please listen to the answer phone and follow the message instructions.

Distance

All is going well in the Distance service. Since July I have reduced my working week by 2 days and Heather has taken on these 2 days. It has been lovely for me to have some extra 'space' in my life, though it has taken me until now to readjust and reduce the workload so that it doesn't overflow the 21 hours!

Heather is enjoying her new distance role and so far, is juggling her different hats as if she had been doing it for years!

Sally continues to work full time and 'holds the fort' when the 'part-timers' are gallivanting. This transition period has gone very smoothly and we are all well pleased with working together and the balance of work. **Yvonne**



Nairn and Ardersier

It is that time of year when the leaves change colour for Autumn and I am sure you will all be aware that there have been lots of changes within Befrienders too. I have taken on two more days working from Inverness for the Distance service and since June have taken on eight face to face friendships for the Inverness service. This means that I will be working in the Inverness office on a Monday and Wednesday, this should not affect the Nairn service except for the occasional meeting in Inverness on a Thursday which will mean on that week I will be in Nairn on the Tuesday and Wednesday.



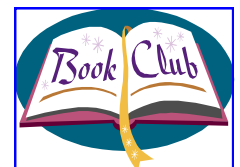
More changes in Nairn as Volunteering Highland, now known as Sign Post have moved out of our office and into next door leaving the office bare and lonely. Not for long though as in October Befrienders Highland will take on the lease in our own right, never to be homeless again, and Highland Employability Service's Susan Jardine will move in and share the office with us. Befrienders will have the office on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, leaving the office available for Susan on Mondays and Fridays.

Since my last article in the wee blether I have to report that the MEN in Nairn have finally come out of hiding and we now have two new male volunteers in process. More would be great but I am happy with two. **Heather**

Book Group

Our Book Group was launched in May and at present we have 9 'bookies' involved. The members communicate via a private Forum on our website. It is still early days but already it has been fun and informative. Some folk have read books they wouldn't normally have come across or chosen. The Books read and discussed so far have been The Distant Hours by Kate Morton; Before I go to Sleep by S J Watson; The Man in the Wooden Hat by Jane Woodam.

There has been variety in how people rate and enjoy the books and the really positive thing is that already different opinions can be expressed without any one opinion being right or wrong. Everyone's views are valuable and a range of opinions gives a bigger and more colourful picture! If you are a Distance friend or volunteer and would like to hear more or be involved with the group please contact Yvonne on 01463 235675 or distance@befriendershighland.org.uk



DUNBAR CENTRE

86 Church Street

Inverness

For folks over 50 years of age

OPEN

MONDAY - FIRDAY

10am-4pm

For

Tea, coffee, soup and snacks

Volunteers and friends are always looking for places to meet, so why not try the Dunbar Centre. There are lots of activities going on through-out the week as well as a place to enjoy a chat and a cuppa.

Monday 12.30

Soup & Sandwich followed by bingo

Tuesday 2pm

Creative writing- tell your story

Wednesday 2pm

Dominoes-scrabble plenty of games to enjoy

Thursday 2pm

Why not try some crafts

Friday 2pm

Sing along afternoon- enjoy the good old music





WISH



WISH (We're In Stitches Highland) had its second Get-together in July. Seven group members travelled from all over the Highlands to meet in BHL offices in Inverness. It was a wonderful day – lots of chat and laughter and even some concentrated work as we all got down to making felt



bags. The bag making workshop was facilitated by two 'crafty experts' who demonstrated spinning at last year's Get-together.



This is a group that definitely wants to develop and in our discussion time came up with the idea of having other 'workshop' type events where group members would share some of their expertise and teach techniques or skills they have mastered. That will be on the agenda for the future!

Sadly Katherine, our editor of the WISH newsletter, has retired. She did a wonderful job creating interesting, informative and fun newsletters over the past two years. We will miss her but do wish her well for all her future ventures. On that note, if there are any budding journalists/sewing experts/publishing people out there who may be interested in helping out with the WISH newsletter we would be very very keen to hear from you!!



Fundraising at the DUNDEE Jazz Festival

A wee while ago Sam, Lizzie, Graeme and Marion shot down the A9 to attend the Dundee Jazz Festival to have a great deal of fun and merriment and along the way to raise some much needed funds for Befrienders Highland.

We are very indebted to Lizzie for doing so much hard work in organising for Befrienders Highland to be one of the official charities to benefit from all fundraising over the course of the music filled weekend. Befrienders received a fantastic £1,180 as a result of all their hard work and we are very grateful for the time and efforts of all who managed to go.



It must have been really hard work listening to all that amazing Jazz music, having a pleasant drink in some lovely venues and meeting a whole load of lovely people—tough job but someone had to do it! Thanks to you all. (Apologies for the blurred photo).