

The Vine Day Centre with Mags Mercer



For the second part of our evening devoted to looking after the most vulnerable in our community, it was particularly appropriate to welcome Mags Mercer because The Vine enjoys a close working relationship with Farnborough Foodbank, who step in when necessary to meet The Vine's emergency needs.

Founded in 1988 as a soup kitchen, since 2012 The Vine has occupied large premises at 33 Station Road in Aldershot. This space means that The Vine can offer a range of services—the Journey Programme—to help vulnerable people move from the fringes of society into responsible living. It has also enabled the centre to increase its volunteer base and strengthen and develop its statutory and agency partnerships.

It is all about second chances and, like Farnborough Foodbank, The Vine is supported by a range of local bodies: statutory authorities; agencies; churches; individuals; community groups; businesses.

During the financial year 2014-2015, The Vine supported 462 clients, 361 of them male. There were 5,314 visits to the Day Centre and 2,804 meals were served, both at the Day Centre and at the emergency night shelter. 1,433 one-to-one client support sessions took place, 538 sessions at the weekly Job Club, 239 clients participated in Creative Arts and 320 attended courses for English Speaking in the Workplace and ESOL.

Some of the people needing support are the homeless, ex-military personnel, victims of abuse and those with mental health challenges. The Journey Programme aims to build self-reliance and resilience, and a good many of those

helped by The Vine subsequently volunteer there, using their own experience to help others.

The Journey Programme begins by addressing the most immediate need in very practical ways, by providing hot food, laundry services, shower facilities and clean clothing. At the same time, advice will be offered to address specific needs, for instance with welfare benefits, addiction support or housing. A health clinic is also provided. Once those purely practical issues are in hand, the programme addresses shortcomings in functional skills, offering anger management courses, literacy and numeracy training, and courses in IT and budget management.

These important practical measures are balanced by other activities to support emotional and spiritual needs, such as creative arts, drama, games, quizzes and faith support. As clients near the end of the journey, they might prepare for independent living by using the Job Club, by creating effective CVs or by practising interview techniques, to maximise their chances of securing a job. They may do some volunteer work, to build experience and to establish work routines. Or they may undertake accredited training in areas such as IT, Food Hygiene or ESOL. Each client journey will be different and the Vine's many dedicated volunteers will provide whatever support necessary for them to achieve independence.



Over the years, The Vine has changed many lives for the better and Mags shared a number of inspirational stories to illustrate this. What came across very clearly is that anyone's situation can change dramatically very quickly. For instance, someone losing his or her job may build up debt, default on rent or mortgage and lose their home, which will inevitably impact mental health and may lead to substance abuse and self-harm. Thus many of the clients in need of help from The Vine have multiple and complex problems, which may take a long time to resolve.

Funding for The Vine comes mainly from local authorities, grants and trusts, but volunteers make a substantial contribution, as do regular donations, both of money and of things like sleeping bags, Shoe Boxes, flasks, food and Christmas gifts. There is additional funding for the Night Shelter and for faith support. Fundraising activities including hooping, cycling, raffles and auctions also make a valuable contribution.



In addition to the Day Centre and associated services, The Vine organises the Emergency Night Shelter, previously mentioned, which last winter provided 155 beds over 31 nights, catering for 28 homeless individuals and serving 310 meals. This earned Lottie and Lee and their team of volunteers an Accreditation Award.

A new initiative has seen the establishment of a Training Academy and Catering Kitchen that prepares client meals, is developing its own restaurant and will provide training, work experience and qualifications to increase clients' opportunities to find work in the catering industry.

For information about donations and volunteering opportunities, visit the website: www.thevinecentre.org.uk