

Exeter Community
Initiatives

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Newsletter SPRING 2009

Recent Highlights

- Flying Start Children's Centre progress was graded as 'good' in the recent Annual Conversation with work in 3 of the 7 areas being 'outstanding'
- Eve Malster started work as the first Community Worker for the Beacon Heath Community Project
- ECI helped organise the first ever Devon Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly with over 100 organisations attending
- The STEPs Project is going 'full-steam ahead' on its fundraising campaign having finalised the Partnership Agreement
- CARD PORCH has supported 13 clients with mentoring and 22 with housing in the last quarter
- Nearly 200 hours of volunteer time have been contributed by our dedicated team
- A new support group for young parents was set up by Flying Start

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Celebrating the VCS in Devon

Over 100 people from different voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations celebrated the first ever VCS Assembly in Devon on 25th February at the Wonford Community Centre, under the title 'Beyond Boundaries'. The event was organised by the Devon Consortium, a group of 'infrastructure' organisations, whose role includes providing support to other 'front-line' voluntary and community groups in the county.



ECI's commitment to the Consortium's work stems from our belief in the importance of a strong, thriving and diverse VCS, and the value of different VCS organisations working in partnership to achieve this: one of the ways ECI demonstrates this is through enabling me to spend time Chairing the Consortium, and doing the wider representative work which then flows from that.

The title of the event 'Beyond Boundaries' is partly a 'play' on the on-going debate about the future of Local Government in Devon, but is also intended to challenge us all to move beyond our comfort zones and make new connections with people and organisations that we might not instinctively link up with.

All of us at some point in our lives will experience periods of crisis, whether it be a family bereavement, relationship breakdown, loss of physical or mental health, loss of employment or other traumatic events. And our ability to cope with these events depends in part on the connections we have with our families and friends, who help us break out of 'the bubble' we can surround ourselves with at dark periods in our lives. One of the ironies of life is that those who are most socially-excluded are often those with the fewest social connections to help them get through, and are least able to identify and ask for other sources of support that might be available from professionals. And increasingly, the professional relationship is being shortened and made more intense, focussing on a specific service rather than providing a holistic response to needs.

The VCS originates from our desire to improve the lives of others; at its best, it is about taking a holistic approach, helping people to make new connections in their lives, particularly at a time of crisis or transition, whether it be through providing a volunteer mentor to support someone before and after release from prison, or organising a support group for people with mental health problems.

This is our strength, and in a very challenging climate for the VCS (see South West Forum's survey: 'Community Crunch in the South West'), and within the wider context of the 'credit crunch', our work is needed more than ever. I urge all who believe in the importance of connectedness in life, to hold on to the over-arching value of the VCS, and celebrate the vital contribution we make to creating a more inclusive Devon, where each of us can fulfil our potential as human beings within vibrant and 'life-enhancing' communities.



Alistair Macintosh – Executive Director

*Promoting social inclusion by enabling individuals
and developing communities*



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

New Developments

STEPS - More than Just Homes

STEPS is a unique housing project that provides a way for local people to contribute to addressing homelessness in Exeter for themselves. It is about much more than bricks and mortar: it is about the reconnection of communities and providing extra 'steps' in the process of becoming independent. STEPS aims to reduce homelessness by increasing the amount of housing available to vulnerable people in Exeter and the surrounding areas. By focusing on those that need long term support we aim to bring them out of the current system, reduce the pressure on the professional floating support services, stop clients becoming institutionalised, and provide them with opportunities to make new strides towards independence.

STEPS is now aiming to purchase one house by Autumn 2009. For this to happen we need as much support as possible. We have had a promising start with a donation of £300. If we had another 399 donations of this size we would be able to buy a flat for our first tenants! Please contact Matt Bell on 01392 661330 or email matt@eci.org.uk if you are able to offer a donation. We are also looking to recruit supportive landlords that are able to give tenants control over their home and use eviction only as a last resort.



Harvest

We have recently been invited to submit a second stage application to the Lottery's Local Food Fund following a successful first stage bid. This means that more work will need to go into developing a Business Plan which describes in more detail how the project will operate. We are aware that there are a number of groups already growing food within Exeter so an important aspect of planning for Harvest will be to map out existing activity and to make further contacts with a view to involving those groups in our project. If you are involved in, or know of existing food growing activities in Exeter, please contact Laura Callaway on 01392 205801 or email laura@eci.org.uk.

In Beacon Heath, we will be piloting a growing project based on a model used by 'Food Up Front' in London where 'street reps' are trained to support people in their local area to grow food. We will be getting free compost from the City Council and we will provide containers, seeds and basic training to get people started. Our experience in Beacon Heath will help to inform the direction that the full 'city-wide' Harvest project takes (see below for more information on the Beacon Heath Community Project). Flying Start are also encouraging their Parents' Forum to take on some food growing activities which will help us to find out which approaches work best and to learn from our experiences.

Beacon Heath Community Project

ECI welcomes Eve Malster as the new Community Worker for Beacon Heath. She has 10 years' experience in community arts and has recently undertaken training in sustainable living and environmental arts.

Eve has already been busy building communications between the community and St James' School through 'The Beacon' (a community newsletter), the new School Newspaper and local heritage work.

She will also be preparing the way for local residents to get involved in growing their own food at home, with 9 hours of free training on offer to train local residents to become 'Street Reps'. These Street Reps will then be able to advise and support other residents in their local area in food growing.

The participants from the Knight Club will be treated to an exciting day of Parkour (free running) with Bristol Parkour coach James Dalby. This will hopefully lead on to community circus skills workshops and other creative activities for the wider community.

To discuss any of the above projects or any ideas you have for Beacon Heath, please contact Eve Malster on 07910 264862 or 01392 205800 or email eve@eci.org.uk.



House Mates

Unfortunately our funding application was unsuccessful, but we will continue to develop our ideas for this type of service. Volunteer mentoring can be applied to many settings and we will continue to develop a project that builds on the work done by CARD PORCH, to provide mentors for STEPS and extend into other service areas. Ideas and contributions welcome. Contact Matt on 01392 661330 or email matt@eci.org.uk.

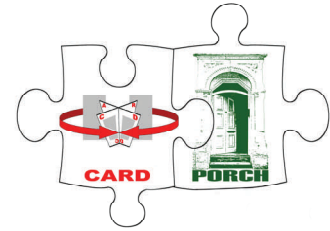
Existing Projects



Eve Malster, Beacon Heath
Community Worker

CARD PORCH

(Closing a Revolving Door and Prolific Offenders Resettlement Through Co-ordinated Housing) Project



In the last quarter we have submitted a partnership bid to the Tudor Lankelly Chase award scheme to fund a new combination of housing and mentoring support. We will hear later in the spring. If successful, our future will look more secure during the next financial year.

The housing need among Prolific and other Priority Offenders is an ongoing issue and statutory partner agencies such as the Police, Probation and ENDAS are united in their support for the work that we do, not only in finding accommodation but then supporting individuals, giving them an extra boost to better enable them to address their needs and make steps away from their offending lifestyle. During the past quarter we supported 22 clients to address their housing and wider needs.

The mentoring support part of the project has needed to contract during the winter months in view of staff sickness. We have held back on starting up new matches and the existing ones have been supported by Claire and Paul with additional help from Gill Amos in January. Thanks to Claire and Gill for stepping in. A number of volunteer mentors have not been active during this period: we hope the situation will move forward soon and we appreciate their patience at this time.

Good work is still being done: four new mentors from the newest group have now been matched and their enthusiasm shines through. One is applying skills as a motivational coach and another beginning to re-awaken the mentees' interest in social activities which has been closed down for a long while. The journey is usually a succession of small steps and some new destinations are in sight for our clients.

A Mentor Development meeting was held recently with a focus on drugs misuse, which was led by a colleague from EDP Drug



A family of tigers enjoys the Young Parents' Group Launch Event



Flying Start Children's Centre

We are pleased to report this quarter on the work that our active and enthusiastic group of parents in our Parents' Forum are doing. They have launched a campaign for more places where mothers can breastfeed in the city centre, have contributed to review and planning of Flying Start services, and will be looking at how Flying Start can become involved in the Dept of Health's Change 4 Life campaign. They meet every Thursday at 1pm in Belmont Hut - feel free to drop in but contact Karen on 01392 666224 if you need a crèche space.

Our Young Parents Group held their open day at St Sidwell's Centre on 5th February. A wide range of activities were on offer and Belinda from TV's 'Big Brother' made a guest appearance. She helped out with the activities and even had her face painted! A great many parents and children attended and it is hoped that many continue to come to the group which meets regularly on Thursdays between 1:30 and 3:30 pm at St Sidwell's Centre.

Andi Tobe, our Outreach Worker is working hard to recruit volunteers to a range of activities and roles. Contact Andi on 01392 666224 or email andi@eci.org.uk to find out more.

"Now I take action.

I deal with things. When someone else behaves badly I now know it's not my fault.

This process has arisen from the self belief and confidence I found through my involvement with Flying Start.

I was a parent at twenty-one and the other parent had 'dependencies'. I became isolated and withdrew from society. I knew that their behaviour was bizarre but felt very guilty and responsible. Although I protested and fought to prevent my baby being affected, above all I was afraid to be on my own.

With my GP's support I ended the relationship and as a result of becoming involved with Flying Start I joined a group which gave me contact with other parents. The buddy system helped me feel comfortable and I now meet weekly with a group of parents and value their support, company and practical help.

I accessed family support and counselling and feel like I am in control of myself and my life, and I can make decisions and be comfortable with them. I am thoroughly enjoying both my children and I know that I am a good parent.

I have become a member of the parents group and have received training to help my confidence. I always have something to talk to other parents about and like to find out their views. I am about to train to help others as a peer supporter and I hope that one day these new experiences will help me gain some more interesting work as well as a more interesting life."

A parent's story

Homelessness Collaboration Project

As part of this project, ECI has been facilitating the church groups that provide soup evenings or night churches to meet, support each other and to co-ordinate their activities. These meetings have been well attended and different topics have been discussed including safety, personal boundaries and confiscation of clients' belongings. The next meeting will be held on 11th March and a representative from the Police will be attending.

Other developments that the Collaboration members have been progressing include looking at ways of co-ordinating the publicity and information about services available to homeless and vulnerably housed people in the city, drafting a simple initial assessment/signposting sheet and further exploration of possible co-location of services for clients with multiple and complex needs.



Supporting Community Development in Exeter (SCDE)

One aspect of the work of this project is to support and develop networks within the city. Currently Carole co-ordinates a network called Beacon Heath Working Together which has been meeting on a quarterly basis since 2005. The purpose of this network is to bring together people from the different groups, organisations and agencies that are working or involved in the Beacon Heath area of the city. The meetings provide an opportunity to update others on current issues or projects, to talk about any new developments and identify any ways in which they can work together. The meetings are attended by the Police, City and County Councillors, Community Patrollers, St James' School, Devon Youth Service, Connexions, and the Churches amongst others.

Currently Carole is in the process of liaising with the Community and Residents Associations in Exeter to discuss their needs for support. In the past some of the associations expressed an interest in linking up with each other and so Carole will be offering to support the development of a network of Associations if there is sufficient interest for this to happen.

If you are interested in attending Beacon Heath Working Together or are part of a Community or Residents Association and would like to link up with other Associations then please contact Carole on 01392 2058207 or email carole@eci.org.uk



Grant Aided by



'Ujima' Project (Supports Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Exeter)

Last quarter Ricky supported the Exeter Polish group to develop a constitution and establish itself formally as 'Polonica'. The organisation launched itself in November by holding a social event to celebrate Andrzejki - a Polish festival - a final fling before Advent, based on ancient folk traditions. The event took place in the Malsters Arms, Woodbury and provided traditional Polish food including doughnuts. The entertainment included fortune telling, games and a disco combining Polish and British music.

Future plans for Polonica include organising further events and they hope to start up a Polish Saturday School, where children of Polish migrant workers can learn about and maintain ties with their native culture and language.



Polonica members celebrate Andrzejki

We have also been supporting Planet Rainbow to sustain its social and educational activities for mixed heritage families. The project evolved after the need for support for mixed heritage families was recognised by a community member. Exclusion, isolation, prejudice and mental health issues such as low self-esteem and identity confusion were identified as growing concerns for this minority group. To meet these needs, Planet Rainbow aims to bring together families in order to promote positive identities and a sense of belonging, while promoting their inclusion in local services and the wider community. We have been looking at ways to help this unique project become more sustainable in the future and maintain their much-needed services.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Beacon Heath Community Project	07910 264862
CARD PORCH Project (Mentoring)	01392 256246
CARD PORCH Project (Housing Support)	01392 205850
Flying Start Children's Centre	01392 666224
SCDE/Ujima Project	01392 205807
New Developments	01392 661330
General Enquiries	01392 205800