



Children's centre faces closure threat

By Diana Cormack

One of the few remaining places in East Finchley that caters for the under-fives could be facing closure as part of budget cuts. Parents who use Newstead Children's Centre in Fallows Close have formed an action group (www.savenewstead.com) to fight against the loss of such a necessary amenity.

The centre recently underwent a £1 million refurbishment programme and has been judged as "outstanding" by Ofsted. It provides a wide range of services for parents and children, including baby care, family and parenting courses, a childminding support network, advice surgeries, stay-and-play sessions and a nursery for two to five-year-olds. There has been a serious reduction in the number of local pre-school playgroups in recent years and the loss of another would be a bitter blow.

The centre is used by all sections of the community. Parents of special needs children have described the potential loss as devastating.

Working parents need Newstead

Losing the nursery would mean major problems for those parents who rely on it in order to go out to work, particularly those in tough circumstances who do not want to be a burden on the taxpayer.

Cheryl Connell has used the centre for her oldest daughter Alice, four, for 18 months and hoped her sister Sophie would be able to join her next year. She said: "Alice has formed strong bonds with the staff and children. We have watched her self-confidence blossom here."

Mrs Connell, a nurse, added that the centre's hours enabled her and her husband Jim, an office worker, to go back to work.



Cheryl Connell and her family are fighting alongside other parents to save the Newstead Centre.

Jenny Borst, whose two-year-old son Tom has recently joined the centre, said there was a misguided perception that East Finchley was home only to middle class parents who could afford private childcare. She said: "There are housing estates here with people managing in difficult circumstances, and there are single parents who use the centre. It is not a middle class luxury."

Funding for Children's Centres comes entirely from central government's "Sure Start" grants.

In a letter to parents,

Andrew Harper, Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Families, said funding was available up to April 2011 but there were no guarantees any centres would survive into the new financial year. Barnet Council said in December that it would consult with staff and parents at all the children's centres and these consultations will close on 31 January before an announcement is made in February.

Generous response after Bobath roof theft

The Bobath Centre for Children with Cerebral Palsy in East End Road is back to full strength following the theft of lead from the roof (*THE ARCHER*, October 2010).

The raiders caused thousands of pounds worth of damage that led to treatment rooms being closed off for health and safety reasons. The theft was especially disappointing since the internationally renowned treatment centre had only just finished raising money to replace a leaking roof above its reception.

However, thanks to the understanding of the insurers and the generosity of local people, the roof of the Grade II listed building has been returned to its former glory.

"We were really over-

whelmed by the generosity of the local community," says Kevin Gillespie, fundraising manager. "In the weeks following the theft, people walked in off the street with cash and cheques. We managed to cover all our costs and it was all down to local press coverage and word-of-mouth."

Donations helped to pay for the roof to be coated with Smart-Water, a chemical imprinted with a DNA-type code that can be read under ultra-violet light. This makes it traceable to the original owner and will act as a deterrent to future thieves.

Children's and youth centres under threat

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The annual report does not mention children and young people although this is OBYCA's registered stated purpose. Instead, OBYCA's principal activity is described as 'the provision of advice, information and counsel for members of the public.'

Rev Muhoro told *THE ARCHER* there was no change in the purpose of the OBYCA or the membership of the management committee. "The three trustees are the executive; all the other members are still there, just not mentioned in the report. And we do run children's activities such as Karate Kid and Soccertots," he said.

He said that police had never been called to the centre but agreed that Al Karim had been asked to leave "because they had not paid their dues". He also said that neither he nor the other trustees were members of Rivers of Joy Ministries.

Looking to the future

At a subsequent meeting with *THE ARCHER*, the Reverend said that two committee members were no longer invited to management meetings because they were found to have had a financial interest in the Old Barn. He also said that he shared the concerns of the action group about the

building not being used for its main purpose, and was looking for organisations to use the centre to run services for children, young people, families and pensioners.

He will be holding a meeting at the Old Barn on 8 January at 6.30pm for anyone interested in the future of the centre. Any charity that would like to run a service should call him on 07957 600 035.

The Old Barn Action Group will be holding its own open meeting early in the New Year. Anyone interested in joining the group should call William Hudson on 07870 647 284.

On the right foot

Shoe boutique Kokos in the High Road sponsored Christmas presents for children attending the Bobath Centre for Children with Cerebral Palsy in East End Road.

Kevin Gillespie, fundraising manager, said: "We really enjoy forging links with the local community and it's great to see that small businesses are still interested in helping good causes."

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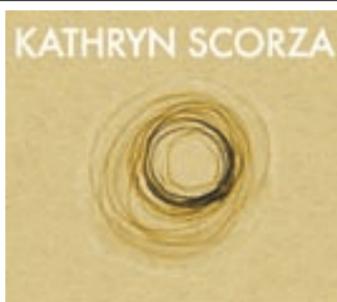
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