

Press release

Date: 18th May 2016

Vital project supporting vulnerable members of the community to improve their mental health and emotional wellbeing appeals for funds to avoid closure

"I'm not sure what I would do without this place... I have nowhere else to go, this is a big part of my life" Project participant

This Mental Health Awareness Week (16-22 May), we would like to highlight the ESCAPE project at Tumbler Hill in Swaffham. The Project, managed by the charity Family Action, supports vulnerable members of the local community with improved mental health and emotional wellbeing. This is achieved through the benefits of being outside, being active, growing, nurturing and eating the food produced by the Project's participants and most importantly of all, through feeling a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose.

The focus of this year's Mental Health Awareness Week is the importance of relationships on positive mental health and one of the key elements of the ESCAPE project is the community of people who participate. Although the project is targeted at those with mental health problems, anyone can be involved and it is the breaking down of barriers and creating a greater understanding of mental illness that has benefited all those involved.

Sadly, the ESCAPE project is desperately in need of funding. It only has funds to continue until September 2016 when, without financial support, it will close. Staff and participants are working hard to find ways to enable the project to generate more of its own income. This includes setting up a shop selling plants and craft items, attending fairs and markets and charging for workshops.

However, becoming more self-sustaining does not happen immediately, and in the meantime the support that this vital project offers to the community is under serious threat.

Clare Peak, Project Manager said:

"This is such a special project and it would be such a great loss to all those involved and to the local community if we cannot find the money for it to continue. We currently support 70 vulnerable adults each week, many of whom depend on this service to support them to become more independent, grow in confidence and connect with others who understand their personal circumstances. By supporting participants in this way, the service helps to save money for statutory Health and Social Care services."

The daughter of one the project's participants told us:

"The Escape Project has given so much to people who are deemed by society as 'different' - whose faces don't fit in. They are all the kindest people you will ever meet. They are not defined by their mental health there. They are all treated as individuals. My mum has bipolar and seeing her come out of her shell and being so confident and happy and having a purpose in life again is the best thing ever for me. I could never say thank you enough."

And the father of another participant shared:

*"It is no exaggeration to say that *Charlie's life was transformed by Escape. And not just his life, the whole family has been lifted in spirit by his placement. From being a withdrawn, psychotic and lonely young man Charlie has blossomed into a lively, interesting and deeply caring person. His interest in plants, and in particular the Heritage Project, has given him a purpose and a goal. He has gained a qualification in Horticulture, a fact which boosted his self-esteem and allowed him to feel a degree of self worth that most of us take for granted. His transformation has been nothing short of astonishing....I would like to thank the staff of the allotment and all those who have invested their money into the project. Charlie's story is just one of many whose lives have been improved and made bearable by the generosity shown in the past. If anyone doubts the efficacy of the project I can do no more than ask them to speak to Charlie. Where once they would have spoken to a deeply troubled and depressed youth, they will now enjoy a conversation with a bright, knowledgeable and erudite young man. I encourage anyone reading this to speak with him. It will be an enjoyable and possibly enlightening experience, and watch for the sparkle in his eye, it took 23 years to get there but it now shines like a beacon"*

The project is open from 10-3 Monday to Friday and those involved take part in sessions where general horticulture skills are developed with lots of opportunities to drink tea, eat together and generally socialise. Katy Fullilove and Karen Bek, Project Co-ordinators for ESCAPE deliver workshops on activities such as willow weaving, scything and cooking in the projects' own Cob Oven. In addition, recently 18 of our Project's participants were awarded their NOCN level 1 Award in Horticulture qualification through a course delivered by the project. For many of our students this was the first qualification they had ever achieved.

ENDS

For further information and interviews please contact:

Media and PR Team

Email: media-pr@family-action.org.uk

Tel: 020 7241 7621/Out of Hours mobile: 07903 074174

Notes to Editors:-

*Name changed to preserve confidentiality

About Family Action

Family Action is a charity committed to building stronger families by delivering innovative and effective services and support that reaches out to many of the UK's most vulnerable people.

We seek to empower people and communities to address their issues and challenges through practical, financial and emotional help.

Our work is wide-ranging and includes help for parents-to-be, the provision of many Children's Centres in local communities, intensive family support, emotional health and wellbeing services, counselling, mediation and therapies, support in schools and financial grants programmes. Family Action is also recognised as a leading provider of training and consultancy, offering organisations and their employees services that can help to minimise family issues that may have an adverse impact on work or home life, providing child and adult safeguarding training, and delivering training around Family Placement.

Registered Charity Number: 264 713

Website: www.family-action.org.uk

Twitter: @family_action

Facebook: Family Action



Building
stronger
families