After the almost complete shut down of the Community Centre in 2020 and the gradual re-opening throughout 2021, this year saw the Association returning to our normal levels of pre-pandemic activity. Since last summer the Centre has been fully open again, and with it our normal year-round programme of activities and groups that are central to our community.

There have been many highlights this year, here are just a few:

The over-60s lunch club and the toddler and baby group continue to be a big success. A particular highlight this year was seeing the baby group expand to another session for toddlers. Previously, the group was for non-mobile babies and carers only, but thanks to extra funding we were able to launch a second group for the next stage. This group is hugely important in reaching out and supporting vulnerable members of our community, filling a much-needed gap. I would like to thank our co-ordinator Sarah and all the volunteers who work running these groups.

Similarly, our over 60s lunch club also fills a vital role in supporting our community. The lunch club is always well attended and it was hugely encouraging to see it being recommended recently. I’d like to thank Rachel, the over-60s co-ordinator, and all the volunteers for all their hard work on this. Both the over60s and the baby groups are an essential part of what the Association does, offering a service that meets a specific need in the community.

This year saw the return of the pantomime after a long break (a year off, and online performancesbefore that). As ever it was a huge success seeing more new people than ever joining the production, selling out for every performance and raising a significant sum. I would like to thank all those involved in making it such a success, especially Debs and Sarah for directing it and Viv for ensuring the production. We are already looking forward to 2024's production of ..... ( it's still a secret!)

A big change this year has been updates to the Community Centre building. Last summer the Association commissioned the artist Lisa Curtis to paint a mural on the front of the Centre. I’m sure you’ll agree the results have been really successful and have given the building a much friendlier and welcoming impression. Inside too there have been several changes with the removal of the carpet in the main hall, and general maintenance and decoration improvements. We would like to thank the Community Payback team who have spent many Fridays at the Centre working hard to help us do outstanding jobs on the building. I would also like to thank Nick Gannon and the volunteer team who spent many hours this Christmas sanding and varnishing the floor.

Another big success this year has been hiring of the Centre. Hire levels have reached a record, with the Centre being used very regularly by both regulars putting on events and classes, and one-off hirers for personal use such as parties. Such regular use opens up challenges too, and we are particularly mindful of how this affects neighbours to the Centre (as well as all local residents).

Other highlights this year were the Winter songs event, which saw community members come together to enjoy singing Christmas songs together and is rapidly becoming a seasonal highlight. I would like to thank everyone who has come forward to organise events to build audiences and funding for the community centre (from the Ukulele group to plays and comedy nights). Your involvement with the Community Association is what makes it such a success..

Whilst many of our events have been successful, others have had to change. Community Café, which at one point was very well attended and had queues stretching to the door, was seeing a big decrease in numbers. In some ways this reflects a changing landscape of community-focused organisations in our area, with more such groups now than there were when the café first started. Luckily it has evolved into the monthly Sunday Roast lunch, and although it is early days, is showing itself to be popular and as well as providing great food also encourages community members to mix and get to know each other.

The FPCA continues to produce the Florence Park Newsletter. Unfortunately the agreement with the printers ran out and we ran a fund-raising campaign to keep the newsletter going. Many local residents and organisations donated generously, but these funds have now run out too and we are seeking a sponsor to help us print the newsletter. We are considering what the next steps will be for the newsletter, our priority for now is to find a sponsor to help it continue. I would like to thank everyone who has worked on the newsletter to make it happen, for submitting articles, designing, and delivering.

I would also like to thank our local councilors Cllr Amar Latiff and Paula Dunne for their support. Our Association trustees Judith (secretary), Jane (treasurer), Becci, Stella, and Rob. To Sara Reevell, our Centre Manager for all her hard work and creativity which is responsible for so much of our success and continues to get us through challenging times. To Alan Brown, Jon Flint and all the Social Club committee members. A special thank you to all the volunteers who have given their time and effort – we are extremely grateful to you all, particularly to Steve who opens the centre most days for hirers and is always a welcoming and helpful presence. And last but not least to all our supporters and funders!

And a reminder that we are always happy to have new Trustees. If you would like to get involved with the running of the Community Association, do get in touch. Being a trustee is a great way not only to get involved with what we do, but also to develop your skills, gain experience, and take on responsibility in your community. As well as trustees, we also have a paid position available to run the Monthly Sunday Lunch club.