FPCA AGM Chair’s report

3 November 2020

Under normal circumstances this speech would be a review of the last 12 months, but due to the outbreak postponing our AGM I’ll be talking about the last 18 months, from April 2019. It seems a very long time ago now, but it is worth remembering that the majority of the last 18 months were before the outbreak. And up until March this year it had been another very successful year for the Florence Park Community Association.

There were many successful events and activities. Events such as the Day of the Dead night, Christmas lantern making and carol walk, the Summer Shorts, Pantomime, variety nights, quizzes, film nights and many many more were all highly successful and allowed us to meet our charitable objectives of improving lives for the community. It was particularly gratifying to see new faces at the Community Centre, whether at one-off nights or regular events such as Community Café.

As well as events put on by the FPCA, the Community Centre continued to attract bookings from hirers for both regular events such as baby café, the return of Humpty Dumpty music group for children, singing women, Acupuncture clinic, Martial Arts, Polish Women’s group, Pilates, and use of the Centre for private hirers.

A particular highlight from the last 18 months was the closer relationship between the Community Association and the Social Club. A greater co-operation has lead to many successful events and a smoother operational running. I look forward to this relationship continuing and going from strength to strength.

The outbreak of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown in March this year meant that much of our work was cancelled or postponed. The Centre was forced to shut, and with that came a loss of income. Fortunately, we were able to keep the over-60s club operational by delivering cooked meals to members and those who were in need. Over 850 meals have been delivered so far. I would like to thank Sara and Jackie for their hard work on this, it provided a highly-valued service during a difficult time. Jackie stepped down from her role as over-60s co-ordinator this September. I’d like to thank her for all her great work with this club. Rachel took over this role, and I would also like to thank her for making such a great start with the meal deliveries. I would also like to thank Flo for her contribution to the meals by baking cakes. We have been able to secure funding so that we can keep providing this service over the coming months.

We were also able to use online facilities to allow us to reach out to the community and provide events during lockdown. Cookery classes for kids – a big thank you to Mondy for doing these; quizzes, and variety nights have all been successful. This year there will be an online winter production which promises to be very exciting.

As well as providing online events during lockdown, we also ran a highly successful outreach project between the Isis Care Home and Larkrise Primary School, further helping to bring our community together.

In September we tentatively began to re-open the Centre, with a limited number of events that followed government guidelines on social distancing and safety. We were able to make use of our fantastic outdoor space. As of this Thursday we are entering a national lockdown, meaning we will be once again unable to open the Centre until the lockdown is lifted. We continue to actively monitor the situation and take advice from Oxford City Council, and adjust our plans accordingly.

With the Centre closing we were faced with a loss of income. We were able to secure a grant of £10,000 from Oxford City Council. We have been successful in securing funding for the over-65s club, and we have received many generous donations from within our community. I would particularly like to thank Sheila Tree, whose face masks raised approximately £1,000 for the FPCA. I would also like to thank the FLoFest organisers, with all money raised from this year’s virtual FloFest going to the FPCA.

Looking forward, there are both opportunities and challenges ahead for us. The outbreak has emphasised the importance of communities, and we hope people in our local community will continue to value what we do and get involved in our work. Our outdoor space presents a great opportunity, and when the upcoming lockdown is lifted we are actively looking at how we can best utilise this space.

The plans for the future of the Centre continue to be discussed with Oxford City Council. We have received strong support from them so far, and we look forward to working with the Council on potential ideas and working towards a viable pre-planning stage.

We also face challenges too. The immediate future is uncertain, and the Centre closing again means less income. We have launched our fund raising campaign to get to £20,000 which will keep us going well into next year. I urge everyone to donate and help spread the word about the work we do and the need to keep it going.

Our committee of trustees work extremely hard to keep the Association active and thriving, but we are currently down to the minimum number of committee members required by our constitution to be able to make decisions. Donations are important to us, but just as important is to have people involved in running the Association. It is a great way to help out your local community by giving your time and getting stuck in with the behind-the-scenes decision making and discussions. I would encourage anyone thinking about joining to please do so, it’s a fantastic way to help your community. We are looking for a secretary in particular, but even if you aren’t interested in this role you can still be a trustee.

Our current membership stands at 197, a good number in any year and even more impressive given this year’s events. Please remember to renew your membership if you haven’t already!

Last of all, I would like extend thank yous to the following for their support: to our local councillor David Henwood, to our county councillors Christine Simm and John Sanders. To Sara Reevell, our Centre Manager whose hard work and creative input is responsible for so much of our success. I would also like to thank departing committee members for their hard work and dedication: Chris Michael who is stepping down as Secretary, and Richard English who has reached the end of the allowed time. All of our departing trustees have put in a huge amount of work, the Association is where it is today because of their input. (and again a request to anyone interested in taking on these roles to please get in touch!). To Alan Brown, Jon Flint, and all Social Club committee. A special thank you to all the volunteers who have given their time and effort – we are extremely grateful to you all. And to all our supporters and funders!

So, whilst the future is uncertain I am confident that we will continue to deliver on our charitable objectives of improving the lives of people in our local community. Looking forward, we are collaborating with Flofest in the Oxford Light Festival to light up our front gardens on Nov 20th and we will hope to be back once the current lockdown is lifted, with the hall open for hire and the garden & bar in full use for social events.

We hope that you will continue to be an active member of our local community!

Adam Wielopolski,

Chair FPCA 2020