

Energising the community spark in Plymstock

Plymstock has long been described by some of its residents as an amalgamation of several distinct 'villages'. Oreston, Elburton, Hooe, Staddiscombe, Goosewell and Turnchapel are each well-served by a variety of community projects, residents associations, church groups and village halls but now there is a concerted effort underway to see if they might all 'join forces' to better-connect all the many and varied community projects.

POP is working with local Councillor Rebecca Smith and Clare Russell - the Co-operative Pioneer for the area - meeting people from across the many different communities to try and see if some form of neighbourhood network might evolve. Stuart Jones, the neighbourhood network lead from POP and a resident of Hooe, says there's no shortage of activity:

"There's nearly fifty clubs and organisations in the Plymstock area but what's lacking is the communication between all these groups: everyone knowing what everyone else is doing and then the means of being able to communicate this to us, the residents."

The hope is that Plymstock will end up with an effective 'network' similar to that of other areas of Plymouth, such as Devonport and Efford through which residents are better-connected with each other and better-informed about what's happening in their neighbourhood. For Stuart, it also has the potential to encourage greater collaborations between local organisations and to help them become more sustainable:

"We hope that through this," says Stuart, "we might generate the opportunity for skills, knowledge and resources to be shared; where people can be directed to the right 'community' place and where projects might work together to bring more funding into the area making it better for everyone."

POP Outreach

We'll be at Devonport Live on Tuesday the 14th of March. 9.30 - 1.30 come and meet the team and find out how POP can support your community.

Turnchapel Residents Association is applying to the POP Cost of Living Fund to establish a warm space in the village

www.plymouthoctopus.org/cost-of-living-community-fund

Soul Singers

Amidst the puddle of babies, toddlers and toys on the floor, a group of 'new' mums are finding their collective voice. They've turned up for the weekly Soul Singers session in Plymstock Library and will spend the next hour singing for joy. One of several Soul Singers sessions for Mums taking place across the city, it has quickly become loved and valued by its participants:

"It's lush," says Sarah Foulis, who has been coming to the Plymstock group since her son Reuben was six months old. "It makes you really happy and no matter what sort of day you're having, it makes you feel that you're in control."

For many 'new mums' having a baby can be overwhelming and many admit to feeling lonely, insecure and of a lack of confidence. But what the women have found in Plymstock Library each Wednesday morning is a place where they can find their feet, share their insecurities, and raise their voice. Emma Drummond, comes as often as she can, bringing Charlotte, her three-year old, and three-month baby Erin;

"I didn't have anyone when we turned up and that was massive because having a baby can be really isolating. And, for me, this group has been absolutely vital because you meet other mums just like you and you can say that you're finding things really difficult and then you find that they are as well."

Soul Singers was set up by MJ, a former primary school teacher, four years ago to bring singing into the community and, in doing so, improve people's health and wellbeing. Funded by Awards for All the sessions are free-of-charge for everyone. There's a mix of songs: pop songs, old 'classics' and little-known gems found on the internet that are based around a theme, such as friendship, colours and places. Finding their way through; making mistakes;



Under my umbrella at Soul Singers

laughing as they stumble and then finding the joy together is both empowering, says MJ, and transformational:

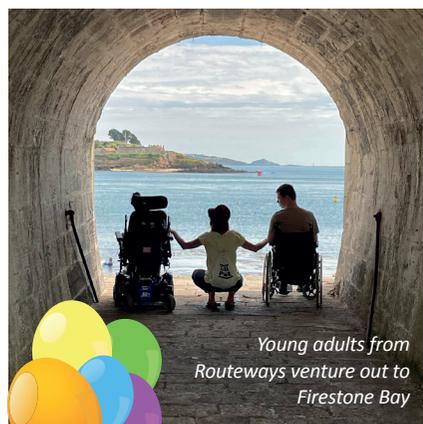
"I know the impact it can have on people's lives," she says. "I know that there are times when someone struggles to get here but they're glad they did. I see the change in them, and I see them walk out of here like a different person."

For many of the participants it's the mix of music and MJ herself that makes Soul Singers so compelling:

"MJ is amazing," says Sarah. "She's like a hidden therapist."

And watching MJ barefoot and bouncing in her bright dungarees encouraging the mums to find their voices while the babies and toddlers play on the floor, you realise that whether it's singing, gardening or knitting that brings people together, it is the empathy, the companionship and the laughter that brings them back.

Souls Singers is organising a wellbeing event on March 11th in Moments café as part of International Women's Day celebrations. For more information on this and all the Soul Singers sessions visit: www.soulsingerscsc.org.uk



Young adults from Routeways venture out to Firestone Bay

Happy Birthday Routeways: 25 years, looking after children across the city.

It used to be several cowsheds but for the last twenty years the Beckly Centre in Radford Park has been a much-needed safe place for young people and their families. Run by the Plymouth-based charity, Routeways, every Saturday and alternate Thursdays there is a youth club, along

The Beckly Centre – a beacon for families

with a holiday club, for children between five and eighteen who have complex additional - medical or behavioural - needs. Sitting on the edge of the beautiful grounds of the former Radford Estate, the location of the Beckly Centre enables young people to have fun and enjoy themselves in a unique environment: friendly, caring and supportive.

As Lucy Clarke the service manager for Routeways explains, it can be the first time that some of the young people have felt able to 'be themselves': "It gives them a safe space and the reassurance that they can be whoever they are all in a place that's understanding of them and without any expectations on them."

For some of the children that come to the Beckly Centre this can be incredibly empowering and very different to that which they experienced before:

"I imagine it must feel quite isolating but when you come to our sessions they might, for the first time, see other people who are like them."

Over the last year Routeways has helped more than a hundred families across the city giving children and young people with complex additional needs the chance to socialise with their peers and have time away from home while, at the same time, providing parents and carers some respite:

"Just to know that every Saturday you've got three hours," says Lucy, "where you can go and do your own thing and not have to worry about the young person is a break and gives them some time where they can just breathe."

For more information about the work of Routeways contact 01752 300700 or visit www.routeways.org.uk

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