

the Arden

Autumn 2009

The newsletter for Voluntary Action Stratford on Avon District

Rural Communities: the heart of the District

Long Compton wins Warwickshire's Calor Village of the Year 2009

Warwickshire Rural Community Council (WRCC) has announced the winners in the prestigious Warwickshire's Calor Village of the Year competition, with Long Compton taking the coveted title for 2009.

Long Compton also won first place in the 'Sustainability' category of the competition, sponsored by Calor Gas Ltd, and will now go through to the national finals to be held later in the year. Described as a 'shining example of an active, caring and sustainable village', by the Warwickshire judges, Long Compton impressed them with the breadth of its activities across the board.

Other individual category winners were Easenhall, judged to be best in the 'Community' section, Wolvey, singled out for its excellence in the 'Business' category, and Welford-on-Avon, placed first in the 'Communication' section.

Competition Organiser Ariadne Uslu said the contest had been particularly difficult to judge due to the very high standard of entries. "These villages demonstrated their clear commitment to rural community life in a wide variety of ways and it was this enthusiasm and dedication to building a bright future that most captured the imagination of the judges," she said.

Chairman of WRCC Brian Douthwaite said, "I am always heartened to see the exciting, innovative and caring projects in which these communities involve themselves. They have once again shown that to live in rural Warwickshire is a marvellous opportunity, and that anyone can become involved in contributing to strong and sustainable communities."

New initiative to help village services

VASA has launched a new initiative, the '101' Footfall Project, to help villages across the District to develop a new business model for providing services and getting more people to use them.

The aim is to extend the 'Pub is the Hub' approach, where pubs turn over unused rooms to use as a shop, by creating village centres to deliver various services. PITH has been successful in more than 150 communities so far.

The first step involves researching existing services and products to find out for example how well used they are, what they cost to provide and what income they produce.

A QC, Philip Grey, supported by a volunteer legal secretary from a firm of local solicitors, has begun a series of interviews with local publicans and retailers, national pub and retail groups and public service providers.

Says David Morgan, manager of VASA's Parish Plans and Rural Outreach Project: "We aim to produce a report that will provide a treasure trove of evidence for entrepreneurs to evaluate the business pros and cons of delivering new services.

"Our analysis of parish plans showed that villages with stores want to keep them, and villages who have lost stores want them back.

"If there is going to be a renaissance in rural retailing, we have to develop a new business model to deliver services and products that otherwise residents will go to larger centres to find. I hope this initiative will start the process".

For more information contact David on 01789 298115 or david.morgan@vasa.org.uk



In Memoriam: Vince Seaman

VASA Trustees, staff and volunteers were shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden death of our President Vince Seaman on September 30.

Recognition of the significant impact that Vince had on both VASA and the wider community appears on our back page.

Photo of Vince Seaman by David Morgan. Banner photo at top of page of Long Compton viewed from the King Stone Field (Rollright Stones) by Julia Phillips



Most times volunteer driving is uneventful, but sometimes there's drama...

**says volunteer driver Richard
Butt of Stratford upon Avon**

After 16 years in a highly demanding job as headmaster of a residential special school for maladjusted boys I needed a rest – but not a full stop. Voluntary driving seemed a possibility – leisurely drives in the country, no stress, little responsibility. Who was I kidding?

The real requirements for the position quickly became quickly. Limitless patience, sense of humour, ability to get on with all types of people (from babies to 93) and a love of driving readily come to mind. Having someone at home to cope with calls from the Volunteer Centre is also extremely helpful.

Like every job, volunteer driving has its drawbacks.

The possibility of long waits, mainly in hospitals, is one. Then there is the parking problem – many places where we take people have nowhere to wait and sometimes it is a case of driving round in circles until the client's appointment is finished. There is the odd fruitless journey where someone has not let the office know they are not going or where someone has been picked up already by another driver.

The mileage allowance is a sore point. It has been 40p a mile for many years now, despite the horrific increase in fuel during that time. The payment has to cover everything – fuel, extra servicing costs, increased wear and tear on the car. Efforts have been made to increase the allowance but we hear of problems regarding have to be taxed if more than 40p is paid.

Personally I feel the present allowance is just about sufficient to cover the costs of a small four door car, but little else. Anyone running a bigger model must surely be out of pocket.

At last the call came – the chance of fame. Would I appear on television to talk about the problem volunteer drivers were encountering due to the ever increasing cost of fuel? This I thought could be the start of a new career. I had been well prepared by the office on what I should try to get across in the interview. But there was little chance to do so as I was asked a prepared list of questions. We waited impatiently for the broadcast. But in the morning they called to say our contribution had been cut. Ah well – perhaps another day?

Volunteer driving has its moments of drama. I have experienced two.

I had returned home having finished a couple of routine escorts. My wife said the office had called to say that a Dr X had contacted them to ask if a lady could be returned to hospital as a matter of urgency. I went. There was no reply to my knock and when I glanced through the window I saw her apparently asleep in front of the television. Aided by a helpful neighbour who had a key we entered the house and eventually put the client in the back of my car.

Halfway to Warwick, on the dual carriageway, a pair of arms encircled my neck and I was informed that there was no way I was taking her to hospital and she would get her brothers to kill me. Struggling to control the car I managed to pull into a lay-by and release my neck. An apology followed and I discovered the lady had been called back to an alcoholic unit.

The second drama happened on July 20, 2007. There was a request to escort a gentleman from a mental day centre to his home about an hour's drive away. It was a horrendous day with numerous warnings of floods. Such was the weather I was advised the gentleman could be returned to Stratford Hospital for an overnight stay.

After about two hours crawling along it became obvious there was no way we could get through, so we attempted to get back to Stratford. But it became clear all roads were impassable. Many hours had passed and my passenger was becoming quite violent as he felt I was stopping him getting home. Things were becoming desperate. We managed to get as close to Stratford as Alcester but once again the road was closed. A place of safety was needed. Knowing that Alcester had a hospital I headed in that direction only to be met by a police cordon and a crowd of people. There were fears the bridge was about to be washed away. As I spoke to an officer my passenger lashed out again and he realised the gravity of the situation. A senior officer was summoned and arranged for us to be walked over the bridge. Eventually my passenger was admitted to hospital. I requested a bed for myself.

I must emphasise that those two events were completely out of the ordinary and most voluntary drivers will never come across anything like them. Most journeys are quite serene.

The job also has its perks – such as free cups of coffee or other drinks. But the greatest perk is the opportunity to help so many people from so many walks of life. For example, my regular journeys involve the Stroke Club, Alzheimer Club, Blind Club, Elderly and Mental Infirm Club and Mental Health, with one off requests to help Social Services and children's organisations.

The job certainly provides plenty of variety, which can't be bad. And I have been doing it for around 20 years.

Community Development Fund

Warwickshire County Council's Community Development Fund (CDF) is designed to help communities, particularly in the more deprived parts of the County, to address issues of local concern to them. The total grant allocation for 2009/10 in the Stratford-on-Avon District is £124,000 and local organisations and community groups are invited to apply for grants of up to £10,000 for one-off projects that will provide lasting benefit to the community and new opportunities for local people, particularly those who experience disadvantage or exclusion from mainstream activities.

This could include setting up a new group, building the capacity of an existing group or running a new project or service. Applications are invited by Monday 30th November 2009.

A full application form and guidance notes can be obtained via www.warwickshire.gov.uk/stratfordarea or via email to the Stratford Area Office at stratford@warwickshire.gov.uk.

If you require any further help or information about the Fund, please do not hesitate to contact Amanda Wilson-Patterson, Localities & Communities Officer on 01789 290787.

Community Links sets new mark

The number of people using Community Links transport scheme each month has topped the 1,000 mark for the first time.

The figure was reached in both June and July – a “significant milestone” says Clarissa Roberts, manager of VASA's Volunteer Centre, which runs the scheme for the county and district councils.

Community Links is a door-to-door minibus service for residents stuck without transport to go shopping, visit friends or make other social visits.

The minibuses operate in different parts of the District on different weekdays between 9.30 am and 12.30 pm. The cost is £1.30 per journey, £2.60 return.

Full information on routes and times and how to register can be found on our website www.vasa.org.uk

Consultation on fire service

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service has begun a series of meetings across the District to hear the public's views on plans to modernise the service.

It says the aim is to create a “stronger, fitter fire and rescue service that can meet the needs of the 21st century.

The meetings will take place as follows:

- Monday 19th October – Bidford
- Monday 9th November – Stratford
- Thursday 12th November – Southam
- Monday 16th November – Shipston
- Tuesday 17th November – Wellesbourne
- Wednesday 18th November – Henley

A copy of the consultation document can be found at www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fire-and-rescue. The consultation ends on 8th December.

VASA backs community forums

VASA is putting its weight behind the District's community forums by agreeing to have representatives at their meetings.

Chief Officer Julia Phillips says: “The forums are still new and finding their feet. But they will play an increasingly important role in giving residents the opportunity to raise concerns and issues face-to-face with councillors and officers sat round a room at the same time.

“In future, we will be joining the councils, police and other statutory bodies so that residents can get more information about the voluntary and community sector and hear our views on issues too.

“Partnership working is about the statutory and voluntary sectors working together closely. Community forums are demonstrating how the different parts of the statutory sector can do so. Now we can extend that to include the voluntary and community sector”.

The dates for the next round of community forums are:

- Alcester/Bidford – November 10, Aston Cantlow Village Hall, 7 pm.
- Henley-in-Arden/Studley – November 11, Henley Memorial Hall, 7 pm
- Wellesbourne/Kinerton – November 5, Radway Village Hall, 7 pm.
- Southam/Feldon – November 4, Southam Primary School, 6.30 pm
- Stour/Shipston-on-Stour – November 19, Newbold Village Hall, 6.30 pm
- Stratford-upon-Avon – November 18, Home Guard Club, Tiddington, 6 pm.

Volunteer Drivers Needed

We have an urgent need for volunteer drivers in Henley-in-Arden, Shipston and Wellesbourne areas.

Do you have the time, care and patience to become a volunteer driver? This vital service provides transport to hospitals, doctors, and day care centres and is a lifeline to many people within our community. Over 32,000 passenger journeys were undertaken by our caring drivers last year. We pay a car mileage allowance of 40p per mile for authorised journeys.

For further information please contact Clarissa Roberts on 01789 262886 or email clarissa.roberts@vasa.org.uk.



Following the launch of the new name earlier this year, VASA asked Silver Lining Graphics to design a new logo that symbolised our role as the voice of the Third Sector in the District of Stratford on Avon.

As you can imagine, this was no easy task! Volunteers, staff and trustees were involved in meetings and reviews at each stage of the development and finally, the logo you see on the left was selected.

The rationale for this image is that two swans appear on the Coat of Arms for the District of Stratford on Avon and in our chosen design, one swan being larger than the other represents the way in which VASA looks after the smaller community groups in the District.

Gardening Project ends first year

VASA's Community Gardening Project has completed its first year – to plaudits from housing association tenants, green-fingered volunteers and funders.



It hit all its targets by tackling 59 overgrown and neglected gardens on estates across the District, providing 358 volunteer working days and recruiting 18 new volunteers, many with mental health problems.



The project was initiated to improve the visual amenity of towns and villages by clearing gardens belonging to tenants unable to clear them themselves, to reduce tensions between neighbours, reduce the fear of crime and teach basic gardening skills to volunteers.

Some gardens had been neglected for many years and took up to 10 days work to clear. Most properties require regular ongoing maintenance visits on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis.

Project Manager Clive Faulkner says: "Recipients of the service have appreciated the work done for them and look forward to our regular

visit. Most provide a cup of tea and a biscuit, which the volunteers appreciate.

"The volunteers enjoy their regular work pattern and have grown in confidence and ability over the year. There has been a marked change in the self-esteem and confidence levels of those volunteers who started the project with mental health issues."

The project was initially funded by a grant from the Stratford District Partnership, but that has stopped. It

Councils should set voluntary sector funding says MP

VASA is backing a call by a leading MP for local councils to fix their voluntary sector grants at the start of their budget cycles.

Alun Michael MP, vice-president the Local Government Association and a former Minister, said that local government funding for the sector should not be an afterthought and he would urge local authorities to make the decisions earlier rather than later.

He said that councils allocated a relatively small proportion of their budgets to the voluntary sector – and if grants were settled at the beginning of the budgetary year they would be able to work around then when allocating other funds.

VASA Chief Officer Julia Phillips said: "If councils did decide their grants early on, then ring-fenced them, rather than getting round to them on at the end of their budget-making it would prevent the grants becoming victims of last-minute cuts.

"But local authorities will be talking about their budgets for 2010/11 in October and November this year, so if action is going to be taken on this it needs to happen soon".

now receives funding Stratford upon Avon Town Trust for gardens within the town boundary.

VASA's Trustees have agreed to draw on reserves to fund the Project Manager's position for a period of three months (August-October 2009) pending the outcome of a funding application to Orbit Housing Association.



Photos: typical gardens at the start of work by our Project Manager and his team of volunteers.

Refreshing the Compact November event

VASA and Stratford District Council are giving the voluntary and statutory sectors the opportunity to review how the Compact is working in the District and propose improvements by organising a half-day workshop on November 6.

The joint move coincides with the publication of a revised national Compact – which sets out how the public and voluntary sectors should work together - during Compact Week (November 2-8).

At the workshop small groups will discuss the following questions:

- Is the Compact relevant and applicable to the wide range of organisations that make up the Third Sector in Stratford District? If not, who is excluded and how might this be addressed?
- Does the Compact go far enough in safeguarding the independence of the Third Sector locally? If not, what changes would be required?
- How might the link between the National Compact and Local Compacts be strengthened?
- What action would you particularly like the Compact Champion and supporting team to take to improve Compact at a local level?

Feedback from the groups will lead to an action to refresh the District Compact.

The workshop will be led by Dave Nash, Strategic Director at SDC and the Compact Champion for the District, and Julia Phillips, VASA's Chief Officer.

Feedback from the groups will lead to an action plan to refresh the District Compact.

The national Compact was established in November 1998. A draft consultation document on proposed changes was issued in July this year. The original Warwickshire Compact was signed in January 2002 by 18 organisations, re-launched in 2005 and now has 57 signatories.

All voluntary and community organisations are invited to attend the workshop and meet key partners from the statutory sector. Full details of this and other events can be found on the VASA website (vasa.org.uk) on the events page.

New organisation for the disabled

The Regional Disability Infrastructure Support Service aims to provide a high quality infrastructure support service to strengthen and develop voluntary and community sector organisations supporting disabled people in the West Midlands.

Its objectives include

- Undertaking research and development to understand how best to support VCS organisations.
- Developing business diagnostics and organisational action planning tools for them.
- Developing and delivering bespoke training.
- Offering customised intensive business support to support organisations to tackle specific issues such as HR or finance
- Providing an online support service.
- Promoting best practice tool kits and packages for organisational development.

The main contacts are Henry Cofie-Squire, manager, and Sue Heppell, development Worker. They can be contacted on 02476 716 217 / 02476 712 984 or rdiss@cdp.org.uk

You're invited to the VCS event of the year

It will be the VCS event of the year for the Stratford District voluntary and community sector – the opportunity to meet councillors and officers and other voluntary and community groups, and learn more about four local initiatives involving volunteers.

The date is November 11, the time 12 to 2.30 pm, the venue NFU Mutual Sports Club, Knights Lane, Tiddington. Free parking is available onsite.

After a networking lunch, there will be presentations from:

ILEAP

A local charity that provides disabled young people with access to sports and leisure opportunities.

Act.com

A health project on the Conway Estate in Alcester.

Graham Adam's Centre

Located at Southam, which houses the children's centre, various voluntary groups and a community cafe.

Shipston Tennis Club

The club has ambitious plans to create a new all-weather facility serving a wide area in the south of the District.

VASA's annual general meeting will follow, and all members are welcome to attend.

VASA Chief Officer Julia Phillips says: "It's an important event with lots to interest those who attend and it's for VASA members only. This will be a great opportunity to meet local decision-makers and other community and voluntary groups."

Please contact Grazyna at VASA on grazyna.hominicmeek@vasa.org.uk or phone 01789 298115 to confirm your place at this event.



Meet the Trustees

Martin Young

Martin was appointed Treasurer of VASA as well as a Trustee in 2008, admitting he was “only vaguely aware” of the role of the then Council for Voluntary Service and Volunteer Bureaux at the time.

“My name was given to Julia Phillips by a colleague of Jill, my wife, who knew I was an accountant who did voluntary work and might have some spare time after finishing my degree studies at Warwick University”.

Martin, managing director of a spring and pressings company in Redditch until retiring in 2003, had been actively involved with Stratford Rugby Club, as a manager and coach of two teams and later Treasurer. He is still District Treasurer of Stratford Scouts Council.

“So I had some exposure to and experience of voluntary work, and I welcomed the challenge of getting more involved in and understanding better the vast breadth of voluntary sector activity”.

Of VASA he says: “My conviction is that it is a worthy organisation that has grown stronger in recent years. The core activity of aiding voluntary sector ‘clients’ by identifying and placing volunteers is an absolutely key function. The Community Transport scheme is an exemplar of what can be achieved with enthusiasm and hard work – and The Loft and Community Gardening projects do amazingly good things”.

Martin – who has three children and four grandchildren – would like the provision of professional staff services to VASA’s ‘clients’ promoted more, though accepts it is limited by scarce resources.

“What I see is that all those involved at VASA remain dissatisfied with progress and achievement in the face of an anticipated period of squeezed funding. That is not a criticism but a sign that we care and want to do better. Not a bad thing”.



Linda Tasker

Linda Tasker has been a Trustee since 2007, when she was elected as a Southam Town councillor. She was the Town Mayor in 2008-9.

Linda has a strong background in voluntary and community work, especially with youth.

She was first involved in volunteering as a teenage youth club helper in her home town of Darlington, County Durham before training to be a part-time youth worker and volunteering with Oxfordshire County Council Youth Service and then becoming a part-time paid youth worker.

She developed an interest in other county youth and adult community services and volunteered/trained as a basic skills tutor – later becoming a part-time then full time tutor – involving recruiting, training, managing and mentoring volunteer tutors.

Linda has also had many years experience helping to build capacity in voluntary and community organisations through staff training/people development, development of management systems and business planning.



Her husband is Chief Executive of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust – the county’s leading environmental charity, which is dependent on volunteers working alongside staff to manage reserves and visitor centres.

Of VASA and the voluntary sector, Linda says: “Challenges include funding and promoting the benefits and opportunities of both volunteering and employment in the voluntary sector to young people and the unemployed.

“The increased professionalisation of the sector as well as challenges of regulation mean there is a continuing need for voluntary sector organisations to adapt and adopt more business practices and focus on an outcomes based approach to their work.

“It is particularly important to be able to demonstrate effectiveness in the current economic climate and with post election cuts likely it will be vital to maximise opportunities for funding and show organisational performance.

Linda’s hobbies are, “family history research and visiting mine and my husband’s “roots”, occasional skiing, playing fiddle to accompany my husband’s guitar.” She has two grown up step sons living in London and Dublin.

VASA in new voluntary sector partnership

VASA and three other VCS organisations in Warwickshire have formed a new partnership to co-ordinate their activities to support and develop volunteering and deliver services throughout the county.

The other members of the new Warwickshire Partnership are WCAVA, North Warwickshire Volunteer Centre and Nuneaton and Bedworth Volunteer Centre.

It replaces a previous Memorandum of Understanding between the four organisations and is a response to the county council's move next year to a single county-wide grant for voluntary and community infrastructure services from a central pool of money, rather than fund organisations directly. The partnership will be submitting an application.

VASA Chief Officer Julia Phillips says the partnership "is a milestone which will strengthen joint working between the organisations, without compromising our independence and autonomy".

VASA's funding arrangements with SDC are outside and unaffected by the new partnership.



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For further details please ask a member of staff at the Library or contact Silver Surfers Project ph 024 7634 2250

Are you ready for the personalisation agenda?

The government's 'Putting People First' initiative will affect every organisation providing services for adult social care clients.

Every adult receiving support, regardless of their level of need, will have choice and control over how that support is delivered – with their own individual budget to purchase that support from whoever they choose.

This poses a number of questions for organisations.

Will their service users choose them if they can purchase the support of their

choice? Do they have a plan to promote their services to new clients? Can they improve the quality of services to compete successfully?

The new initiative is still in its early stages, is being phased in gradually and a number of issues remain unclear – for example, what will happen to current contracts.

But it will lead to a radical shake-up in adult social care provision and organisations need to be ready.

For further information, contact Jon Reading, Commissioning Service Manager with WCC's Adult Health and Community Services on 01926 745141.



Big increase in volunteers

There has been a big rise in the number of people across the District signing up with VASA's Volunteer Centre to volunteer with local organisations.

VC Manager Clarissa Roberts reports there was a 65 percent increase in the period from February to June – a "really significant jump".

"Every month saw an increase over the same month last year, in some months more than double. And the increased interest in volunteering applies to all age groups, although many of those coming to us are between the age of 18 and 25. She says the centre was managing to place would-be volunteers because "there is a complete spectrum of opportunities available for people".

Some of the more unusual opportunities currently available include working for the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, helping Warwickshire Police give out crime prevention advice and playing the piano in one of the local National Trust properties. "We can generally find something for everyone", explained Clarissa.

VASA chief officer Julia Phillips says: "The recession is a factor – people losing their jobs are turning to volunteering because they have the time and want to use their skills.

"But as well as publicising local opportunities, we have been promoting volunteering vigorously to raise its profile, so the increase is linked to a greater awareness of its benefits both to the volunteers and the organisations.

"There does seem to be a definite trend which is very encouraging. It is up to us to capitalise on the growing interest in volunteering and sustain the numbers of volunteers who actually get involved."

Clarissa says the VC has reviewed its procedures to make it easier for people to sign on as volunteers and for her team to place them with organisations and to monitor them every six weeks.

Thanks to Key Funders

VASA is grateful for the support of its key funders: Warwickshire County Council; Stratford on Avon District Council; Stratford upon Avon Town Trust; PCT.

The Loft: fixing furniture and fridges, restoring people's lives for ten years

The Loft is a Voluntary Action Stratford-on-Avon District (VASA) project which collects donated furniture and white goods, and redistributes them to families in need after they have been repaired or renovated by people suffering or recovering from mental illness. Celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, it is still committed to its original ideals.

If The Loft's business is restoring cast-off household items for reuse, its mission is restoring self-belief to those cast down by mental illness.

To workshop supervisor Don Kiddle, whose own successful teaching career was cut short by illness, it "offers an escape from the mental health system and the chance for people to do something about their problems themselves".

Roy, one of the workers there, says simply "It has changed my whole life".

The Loft stands out among furniture recycling projects because of its focus on working with people with mental health problems. "We've always been proud of that", says Alan Bartlett, chief officer of VASA's predecessor organisation, the Council for Voluntary Service which set up the project.

He explains: "We used to get people with mental health problems coming to the Volunteer Centre to sign on. But it was difficult to find them suitable opportunities.

"We wanted to get them involved, so Clarissa Roberts, the Volunteer Centre manager, and I decided to point them to a small furniture project we were running. It became The Loft and has proved to be extremely successful".

Dave Smith joined The Loft as project manager six weeks after it started, stood down about two and a half years ago but still works there as a volunteer.

He recalls: "Right from the beginning we took people with mental health problems, including teachers, company directors and young people. They learn skills and we provide some routine to their lives. For some, the day they spend here is the best day of their week".

The Loft has made big strides since the early days. As Dave remembers: "We used to get odds and ends of old furniture that we would collect by car until we could get a van. But it grew and grew until it was decided to put things on a more organised basis".



Today, it operates three mornings a week, 12 hours in all, from a workshop and offices located between the Stagecoach and Verdant depots on the Avenue Farm Industrial Estate in Stratford, and stores the items it collects in a nearby warehouse.

The Loft is a highly successful social enterprise project. Last year it collected 17 tonnes of items from doorsteps across the District and delivered 16 tonnes, otherwise bound for tips or skips, to 648 individuals and households – providing them with the bare basics, a chair to sit on, a table to sit at, to build a home.

But, Helen Wood, The Loft manager, and her team emphasise it also provides those hit by mental illness with the basics –

confidence, self-esteem, a 'can-do' attitude – they need to rebuild their lives.

That includes teaching new skills. For example, Gary Talifero recently took an intensive one-day training workshop to gain the qualification to help volunteer Martin Sheridan with testing donated electrical goods to ensure their safety for reuse.

However, Don complains that "local companies won't offer work to people from here, not even as volunteers".

About 100 people have passed through The Loft's doors in the past decade. The project has never played the numbers game. Helen, who took over from Dave Smith, insists: "We don't have a sheep dip approach to people with mental health problems. We take an individual approach.

"Some of the guys come here at rock bottom. Most have low self-esteem, low self-confidence. We're not judgmental. We provide an environment where they can tackle things on their own and take responsibility for what they do".

Don Kiddle reinforces this. "We facilitate, not teach. They arrive here very insecure. But when they regain their sense of security, it comes from them, not from me".

He retired early as head of a school design and technology department, and joined The Loft in May 2008. "I know personally what it's like to have their problems. Mental illness is a stigma, but not a barrier. The barrier is the system, which holds you in like a spider's web.

"We offer them the opportunity to step outside the system, and do something



about their problems themselves. We offer something different from a talk or a tablet to people who often have nothing else in their lives”.

The Loft has picked up glowing testimonials for “offering something different from a talk or tablet” for ten years – but what of the future?

According to Helen, the project is “at the crossroads in terms of taking it forward, and in what direction”. It will need new premises, perhaps even a retail outlet in order to expand.

And she points out that while the project receives “wonderfully generous” support, financial and materials, from the Stratford Town Trust, the county and district councils, the RSC, B&Q and Ragley Hall “there are always uncertainties.”

VASA chief officer Julia Phillips says: “The Loft has been hugely successful in helping families in need and people with mental health problems, and we are looking at various options to take the project forward”.

That ‘s for the future. For now, Roy is focused on his work. “I love it here”, he says. “If for any reason The Loft had to close, it would break my heart”.



More than a recycling project

The Loft does more than recycle unwanted furniture and electrical goods.

It also produces small items of garden furniture, bird tables, bat boxes and even rocking horses from reclaimed timber which are sold to help VASA with the costs of running the project.

Peter Wiltshire, a volunteer for the past six years, says: “I enjoy helping anyway. But working on those items is particularly rewarding because it requires us to learn more skills. We even produce things for The Salvation Army”.

Says Roy: “I had never had a bird table before. When I made my first one, I took it home, put it in the garden and told my family, neighbours and friends ‘I did that’.

There is also a weekly handicrafts group set up by Louise Male, previously workshop supervisor.

Attendees are vulnerable women who have been either victims of abuse or who are suffering or recovering from mental illness. They develop creative skills to produce beautifully designed, carefully handcrafted needlework and collage wall art, which is on permanent display in the reception area.



Photos by David Morgan: Above left Helen Wood and Don Kiddle with one of The Loft’s delivery vans. Below left, Dave Smith in the workshop. Above, Helen Wood with two of the workers, Roy (left) and Eric with one of the items made in the workshop using recycled timber. Article reprinted by courtesy of The Stratford Herald

Introducing Jenny Murray, our new link at WCC

After three months managing the county council's Stratford area office, Jenny Murray has formed a clear view of the voluntary and community sector in the District. "Vibrant, active and vociferous – in a good way", she says.

Jenny is well qualified to make a judgement: most of her career in local government has involved working closely with the sector, championing its corner and working hard – and successfully – to encourage the statutory sector to embrace it as a true partner.

It is a track record that will obviously help the sector here.

Her parents were both local councillors, in different parties. But Jenny was more interested in "the delivery of services, not the politics".

She joined Hereford and Worcestershire County Council in its democratic services section, then moved to Redditch borough council to manage a team of committee administrators before becoming policy officer in 1993.

Jenny is proud that she developed the council's first social inclusion policy and set up its first democratically elected youth council, which was seen as best practice nationally and taken as a model for other authorities to emulate.

She linked the youth council with the Young Enterprise scheme and persuaded several big companies to invest £50,000 to spend on youth projects. As a result of that experience, she is keen to see the proposed youth forums in Warwickshire get fully up and running – and link with the new Community Forums.

Jenny believes her work on social inclusion in Redditch will serve her well in Stratford.

"The wards there are a mix of affluence and poverty, hidden poverty, similar to parts of this District – and it can be extremely frustrating when resources are focused on the obviously deprived areas".

At Redditch, she helped set up a multi-agency committee with powers and funding to tackle social inclusion issues, and also developed one of the first Community Plans in the country. She is also proud of influencing later waves of the Sure Start funding so that in Worcestershire for example money went to areas where poverty co-exists with affluence.

Jenny took two years away from local government to work for a community regeneration consultancy. Two of the projects she



The team at WCC Stratford Area Office: l-r Amanda Wilson-Patterson, Jenny Murray, Lizzie Price and Ali Mainey. Photo by David Morgan.

worked on were a family learning centre and a knowledge café for young homeless people – both addressing literacy and numeracy problems.

She returned to the public sector as an area democracy officer with Worcestershire county council, working with councillors to promote their community leadership role and also working with community forums and the LSP.

"I was closely involved with the voluntary and community sector through the LSP and I soon realised that the funding arrangements were all over the shop", Jenny recalls. "I was asked to look at the gaps in the way the council worked with the sector and what it needed to do to help the sector be sustainable."

When the council decided that the way forward was through a Compact, Jenny was given the job of developing and taking it forward – which she did for three years before moving to Warwickshire.

"We wanted to distinguish between contracts and grants", she says. "It was controversial and divided the sector. But some organisations supported the move.

"We developed an approach based on Shopping, Investing and Giving. We put together a package of jointly developed support. We consolidated all the council's investment in the infrastructure of the sector into a single contract that was won by a consortium set up by the VCS. And we centralised the grants process.

"I also rolled out this work to the county LSP and other public service partners with the aim of developing a single county-wide model for supporting the VCS."

Jenny moved to Warwickshire County Council because "I felt I had done my job with the voluntary and community sector in Worcestershire. Initially working in Warwick she moved to take over the Stratford area office in July.

She feels that two of the key issues in the District are access to services and young people – and believes the fledgling Community Forums can play a key role in tackling them, and others, by working more strategically and, if councillors agree, giving them funds to spend on local initiatives.

"The forums have a solid foundation, but it will take time because democratic engagement takes time".

Jenny is positive about the voluntary and community sector in this District. "VASA and other organisation are obviously excellent work which is much appreciated. I think it is important that we assess the economic and social impact of the sector because we don't always appreciate its value".

Jenny, who is 42, is married – her husband is a maths teacher. They have two children, Miranda 15 and Christopher 10, and two dogs, Isabelle and Gary. The family takes lots of city breaks in Europe, and Jenny herself is an avid reader – "of rubbish".

Volunteer Opportunities

The Volunteer Centre currently has a range of opportunities for volunteers including Card Shop Assistant for 'Cards for Good Causes' and an Honorary Treasurer for the Parkinson's Disease Society.

If you think that your organisation could benefit from the use of volunteers, why not get in touch with Clarissa Roberts or Charles Barlow at the Volunteer Centre to discuss how we can help you?

We can provide a full service to help you to develop a volunteering strategy and policy and provide advice on how best to manage volunteers to ensure that their valuable skills are put to good use on behalf of your organisation.

For further information phone 01789 262886 or email info@vasa.org.uk



Apply now for a Town Trust grant

Every year the Stratford-upon-Avon Town Trust distributes about £1million to charitable causes which benefit the people who live in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon.

Applicants will be expected to deliver the Trust's priorities: improve people's quality of life, make the community stronger and more cohesive, bind people together and make them feel that Stratford is a good place to live and work?

They will also have to demonstrate that projects will be easily accessed by all who would want to access, ensure that "no one is left out", and satisfy the Trust that the projects will be well run with adequate control.

Applications can be sent in at any time but the next grants round closes on Friday, 23 October.

Further details from Anita Applebee on 01789 210108 (direct line) or email to anita.applebee@stratfordtowntrust.co.uk

Calling all Sport Clubs



Do you or someone you know help to run a community sport or recreation club?

Could your club benefit from help to review its constitution, health and safety policies, or general administration?

VASA has staff who are experienced in sport management from club to elite level so why not get in touch and see if we can help your club?

We can help you undertake club health checks (essential if you intend to seek Club Mark), review your policies and assist with a range of activities including governance, funding assistance, marketing and publicity.

Our Volunteer Centre can also help you to recruit and manage your volunteers, so do get in touch with us if we can assist in any way.

Ph 01789 298115 or email enquiries@vasa.org.uk

When will the Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) launch?

The new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) launches on 12 October 2009. Individuals will be able to register from July 2010.

What will change on 12 October 2009?

Increased safeguards will be introduced, further enhancing protection of children and vulnerable adults.

The three current barring lists (POCA, POVA and List 99) will be replaced by the creation of two new barred lists administered by the ISA rather than several government departments. Checks of these new lists can be made as part of an Enhanced CRB check.

Employers, social services and professional regulators have a duty to refer to the ISA any information about individuals who may pose a risk ensuring potential threats to vulnerable groups can be identified and dealt with.

There will be criminal penalties for barred individuals who seek or undertake work with vulnerable groups and for employers who knowingly take them on.

The eligibility criteria for Enhanced CRB checks will be extended to include anyone working in a regulated position.

What will change in July 2010?

From 26 July 2010 all new entrants to roles working regularly with vulnerable groups and those switching jobs to a new provider within these sectors in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, will be able to register with the ISA and be checked.

Individuals will be able to apply for ISA-registration and a CRB check (including an ISA check) on one new application form.

When a person becomes ISA-registered they will be continuously monitored and their status reassessed against any new information which may come to light.

Employers can subscribe or register an interest in an individual's ISA-registration status to be continuously informed of changes in an employee's registration status.

So as not to disrupt normal recruitment over the traditionally busy summer period, the legal requirement for employees to register with the ISA, and employers to check their status, will come into force in November 2010.

Abbreviations:

Criminal Records Bureau – CRB

Independent Safeguarding Authority – ISA

In Memoriam: Vince Seaman

VASA Trustees, staff and volunteers were shocked and deeply saddened by the sudden death of our President Vince Seaman on September 30.

He had been taken ill at a meeting at the Stratford District Council offices and died later. He was 72.

As a Trustee for more than 25 years and Treasurer and Chairman before becoming President, he played a huge role in VASA's predecessor organisation, CVS/VBx becoming – as he put it – the “recognised leader of the voluntary sector”.

Vince's association with CVS/VBx began when “Dave Roberts, my old jogging mate, persuaded me to join the Board to bring along, in his words, some extra business experience to the fledgling organisation”.

At that time, CVS/VBx had little assured income and survived on small handouts and fund raising, and operated from an office at the old Workhouse on the Stratford Hospital site.

He became Treasurer then Chairman in quick succession. “CVS/.VBx continued to survive on a hand to mouth basis and for a number of years relied heavily on volunteer staff in its four offices to maintain services”, he recalled last year.

Vince always acknowledged the work of Alan Bartlett and Clarissa Roberts in taking the two parts of the organisation from strength to strength and expanding services. But there is also no doubting his immense contribution.

Nor his dedication: even after 25 years as a Trustee, Vince said he still found it a “delight to serve on the Board with other members who have a wide range of skills and enthusiasm so essential to an organisation that will only survive if it is run on a sound business basis”.

Vince also played a prominent role in the wider community, especially Stratford town.

He was elected to Stratford District Council in 2003, and when Chairman in 2008-09 he characteristically chose the Volunteer Centre as one of his charities, and raised over £9,000 for the VC, Air Ambulance and Marie Curie. The Centre bought eight new wheelchairs with its share (see below).

Vince was also a Stratford town councillor for 11 years and was Mayor of Stratford in 2002. He stepped down from the Stratford Town Trust in 2008 having been chairman for a number of years. His wife Joy, also a town councillor, is a strong supporter of VASA as well.

VASA Chief Officer Julia Phillips said: “Vince's contribution to VASA, its predecessor organisation CVS/VBx and the voluntary and community sector generally in the District is incalculable, and his involvement as a Trustee for more than 25 years showed an extraordinary commitment.

“As first Treasurer, then our Chairman, he played a hugely-important role in building up CVS/VBx to become the lead organisation for the sector, providing a number of services essential to the community and working with councils and others as a valued and respected partner.

“His enthusiasm never waned, he provided invaluable experience and wise counsel to me personally as President, and he was always an unswerving ambassador for the sector and volunteering. Everyone at VASA – Trustees, staff and volunteers – will miss him greatly, as will many, many volunteers across the District”.



Vince Seaman during his year as Chairman of Stratford on Avon District Council. Photo by Stratford on Avon District Council, reproduced here with permission.

New wheelchairs

During his year as Chairman of the District Council, Vince Seaman raised over £9,000 from his fund-raising activities. At his request the money was shared between VASA, the Air Ambulance and the Marie Curie Fund and in accordance with his wishes, the money was used to purchase some new wheelchairs for VASA's free wheelchair loan scheme

Vince and his wife Joy (below) are pictured with Clarissa Roberts, manager of VASA's Volunteer Centre, and two of the new wheelchairs.

A personal note from Clarissa Roberts

I have known Vince Seaman for 27 years, since he joined us at what was then the Council for Voluntary Service and Volunteer Bureaux. He was our volunteer Treasurer to start with, then Chairman for some 16 years, and has been our President for some time. Vince was the backbone of the CVS/VBx, guiding us through some difficult times and helping to grow the organisation. With his wife Joy he has organised many fund raising events and raised thousands of pounds for us and other charities.

I have always had the utmost respect for Vince in his sincerity, fair-mindedness and dedication in his wide-ranging voluntary commitments but most of all he was a wonderful, caring friend. His sudden passing is a sad and heartfelt loss to Joy, his family and the whole of the community.

