



Three Stratford Scouts embark on an International Scouting Adventure

A troop of Scouts from across Warwickshire have been specially selected up to attend the 22nd World Scout Jamboree in Sweden.

Tens of thousands of Scouts, from every corner of the world, will gather in a tented city for two weeks of activities and adventure and 3 Scouts from the Stratford on Avon District have gained a place at this life changing event. George Hayward, Ross McIntosh and Evie Hodgson from Stratford on Avon District have been busy fund-raising and attending camping weekends with the other Scouts in the Warwickshire Troop.

At the Jamboree, which will be held in July and August in Sweden, 30,000 Scouts from every corner of the world will

live and learn together. Their aim is to promote peace, international friendship and will offer both young people and adult volunteers all kinds of new experiences. From adventurous activities to workshops on global issues and hands on science and technology, the opportunities will be endless.

Andy Shorter the newly appointed County Commissioner for Warwickshire and Jamboree Unit Leader said. "Of our unit of 36 young people who will represent Warwickshire next year in Sweden 3 come from Stratford on Avon. Over 100 young Scouts competed for these places so the Stratford Scouts did well to be selected."

George Hayward, Ross McIntosh and Evie Hodgson said "Our training started back in February with our "getting to know you" day. Inspired by the words "Strangers are just friends you have not met yet" we took part in a variety of tasks designed to encourage interaction and help build the skills necessary to get the most from the Jamboree; teamwork, Scouting skills and working in the community. It's going to be the most fantastic journey, which we are all looking forward to."

Anyone interested in getting involved with Scouting in the Stratford area can call 0845 300 1918 or go to www.warwickshirescouts.org.uk and climb on 'want to join'.



About Scouting

The Scout Association was founded on 1st August 1907.

Adventure is at the core of Scouting, and the Association passionately believes in helping their members fulfil their full physical, intellectual social and spiritual potentials by working in teams, learning by doing and thinking for themselves.

Over 200 activities are offered by Scouting around the UK, made possible by the efforts of 100,000 voluntary adult leaders. This has helped make Scouting the largest co-educational youth Movement in the country.

One of the challenges that the Scout Movement faces is finding more volunteers to plug the current gap. At present there are more than 33,000 young people on waiting lists.

Adults working in Scouting contribute in excess of 364 million hours of voluntary work each year to their local communities.

The number of volunteers working for Scouting is bigger than the combined workforces of the BBC (24,000) and McDonalds (67,000) put together.

Worldwide Scouting has 28 million members, both male and female, and operates in nearly every country in the world.



George Hayward TRED Explorers Scouts, Evie Hodgson Newbold Sea Scouts and Ross McIntosh TRED Explorer Scouts.



Find out how you can
create Games inspired
volunteering opportunities

**And bring the 2012
Games into your
organisation.**

Workshop on Games inspired
volunteering – invitation to attend
your local workshop at:

Date: Thursday 10th March 2011

Time: 5.30pm - 9.30pm (inc. buffet)

Venue: Welcombe Hills Golf Club,
Warwick Road, Stratford upon
Avon CV37 0NR

Host: Voluntary Action
Stratford-on-
Avon District



VASA pushes for government help for volunteer drivers

VASA is pressing the new coalition government to act urgently and increase the expenses for volunteer drivers who take elderly and disabled people to hospital and doctors' surgeries.

It warned that unless the current allowance of 40p a mile, frozen since 2002, is raised, many drivers will be forced to give up – with “disastrous consequences for those who've no other way of getting to their medical appointments”.

VASA has already met Nadhim Zahawi, MP for Stratford on Avon, to discuss its concerns – and Clarissa Roberts, its Volunteer Services Manager, said: “He understood our worries, was keen to help and I'm sure he'll raise the matter with Ministers”.

She said: “We pressed the previous government but without success. The situation has worsened since and volunteers have reached breaking point.

“With petrol prices so high many drivers simply can't afford to continue, for all their enormous goodwill. The 40p allowance was set when petrol was a little over half what it is today and it is simply inadequate. At the same time of course, other motor costs have also risen steeply.”

Last year, VASA's volunteer drivers provided 30,689 passenger journeys covering 498,607 miles involving 60,000 volunteer driver hours.

“We realise that the government is looking to reduce rather than increase spending”, said Mrs Roberts. “But in their election manifestos, both parties

in the coalition said they wanted a bigger role for the voluntary sector and volunteers.

“Volunteers should not be out of pocket. It's expecting too much of people who are giving up huge amounts of their time to provide an absolutely essential service, especially when many of them are on fixed incomes.

“This is a very large rural district. Getting around is very difficult for people without their own transport. Getting to hospitals in Oxford or Coventry would be impossible for many without the volunteer drivers. If drivers give up, the consequences will be disastrous.

“The alternative could be for the NHS to pick up the bill by paying for taxis which the AA estimates could cost four times as much. So it makes economic sense for the government to act”.

Sport Volunteering Made Easy



Coventry University, CSW Sport and VASA together identified the need for a workshop on the subject of sport volunteering to engage the voluntary sector and increase understanding between the voluntary and sport sectors in order to begin working closer together in local partnership.

This was identified through various communications and confirmed through a survey carried out among the local volunteer centres where 90.9% of respondents across the sub region replied 'yes' to a need of 'Volunteer Centre staff to be trained and supported in the development of sport volunteering opportunities and recruitment of sport-related volunteers' and the remaining respondents claiming they were unsure.

Key organisations and stakeholders across the sub region of Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire were invited to attend from both the sport and volunteer sectors. VASA coordinated inviting volunteer sector partners; CSW Sport

coordinated sport sector partner invites. Other participants were from local authorities and the education sector.

The day began with an inspiring opening address by Steve Drummond (Chairman of Warwick Tennis Club). Steve spoke in glowing terms about the value that volunteers bring to his club and left the audience in no doubt of his commitment to supporting closer links between volunteering and sport.

The first half of the workshop was presentation lead with the aim of increasing the basic knowledge of volunteer sector partners of sport infrastructure. There was also an explanation to sport sector partners of the volunteer sector infrastructure and core functions. This was followed by brief “2012 Inspires” presentations.

Those presenting were: Julia Phillips; Mark Berry; Emma O Dowd; David Boughey; Matt Kendall and Tom Cliff.

The presentations were followed by an interactive workshop session where participants broke into three groups to discuss the current model for sharing

and processing sports volunteering opportunities and volunteer enquiries. A second session allowed participants to reflect on these discussions to propose a consistent approach to sharing and processing sports volunteering opportunities and an agreed way forward.

Using the outcomes of these workshops, the partners are now in the process of developing a robust and consistent approach to sport volunteering that can be rolled out across the sub-region to help sport clubs, local authorities and volunteer centres work better together.

For more information or a copy of the report from the workshop contact:

Charles Barlow, Volunteer Centre Manager on 01789 262889 or email charles.barlow@vasa.org.uk

David Boughey, Sports & Physical Activity Volunteering Coordinator on 0797 498 4920 or email aa6692@coventry.ac.uk

Emma O'Dowd or Mark Berry, CSW Sport, on 02476 574200 or email info@cswsport.org.uk

Fighting back against the cuts

Voluntary and community organisations will have to adjust to being smaller and learn to become smarter to cope with the impact of cuts in their funding, according to Kevin Curley, the Chief Executive of NAVCA, the umbrella body for the sector.

That includes “rediscovering our enthusiasm for volunteers”, rekindling “old fundraising skills” – and charging for some services, he said in a recent speech.

Kevin said that medium-sized organisations had been worse hit by the recession, and those with incomes between £100,000-£400,000 will be hit hardest by cuts to follow – especially where they have enjoyed strong support from the local authority and the Primary Care Trust in particular.

“We are talking about the Citizens Advice Bureau with six staff and 50 volunteers, a Home-Start organisation with five staff and 70 volunteers or a Volunteer Centre with four staff recruiting and placing 3,000 volunteers in 2009.”

“If I am right about the impact of the cuts building on the impact of the recession then for many of us the next nine months will be dominated by reducing the services we provide, losing staff and losing volunteers.

“If we’re to protect what matters most to our communities we will need to select the battles to fight. Many of us have good relationships with elected councillors and with officials in local government and the local NHS. Many of these people will continue to be our allies.

“But many of them will be competing with us for reduced resources and will have more opportunities than us to influence the selection of local priorities. So we must continue to engage with the Local Strategic Partnership and with Scrutiny Committees.

“We must respond to arbitrary cuts – those which are unfair or which seem to favour the local authority’s own services for no good reason – with vigorous campaigning. We must use the Compact. And we must use public law challenges

as a last resort if cuts are made without proper consultation or without Equalities Impact Assessments taking place.

“But continued engagement with the people who have become our partners is vital. They will be under enormous financial pressure just as we are. They will want to protect their own services but many will know how vital our work is too for disadvantaged communities.

“Many of us have expanded our organisations, employing more people. We are now going to employ less. We must rediscover our enthusiasm for volunteers. Paid staff enabled us to do a lot more work but if the money is not there we must make more creative use of volunteers.

“We must look for new ways of relating to the local private sector. We will need to find new ways of matching their corporate engagement strategies with community needs.

“The days of sending someone off with a list of trusts from Funder Finder must be over. It creates the illusion of funding opportunities and wastes everybody’s time. Charities will need help to deal with the new political agenda.

“We must make creative use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook. They can both be powerful tools for campaigning and for fundraising.

“We must help local charities and groups to make best possible use of the Big Lottery Fund. This will become an even more crucial funder in the future.

“Not every service can be sold but we know that some local organisations have been much more successful than others at generating their own income. We will need to challenge assumptions.

“No-one expects to get a place on a training course now for nothing. Nobody expects to ride in a Community Transport minibus for nothing. Nobody expects a Home Help to come without making some contribution. We must test every service we by asking *Can we make a charge for this - can at least some people pay for this service?*

“We will also have to be better at helping people to rediscover old fundraising skills. Organisations will be much smaller. So, money raised from

street collections, sponsored events and private sector donations in kind will become more significant. These are probably funding options many of us have not considered in recent years.

“Finally, we must respond to new contracting opportunities mentioned in the Coalition Programme. If contracts are on offer and are to be awarded competitively we must improve our tendering skills. We need to get staff, volunteers and trustees, trained up to understand commissioning and procurement procedures. We may need to put new structures in place and to work in new ways with other local organisations with shared interests.”

Partnering business to help rural economy

VASA is linking up with the Stratford Business Forum to support existing and start-up retail enterprises across the District.

The Forum, the successor to the Stratford Town Management Partnership, has held two seminars for retailers and plans to extend the programme with further events and activities every two months.

VASA’s Rural Outreach Manager David Morgan will be working with the Forum to co-ordinate appropriate joint activities as part of a combined drive to revive the local rural economy.

“The aim is to provide the best possible package of support for rural retailers”, explains David.

One District-wide project is a retailer survey designed to identify what support is needed.

Copies are available from Jonathan Smith 07966 512 573 or jonathan@pinkconnect.com or through David Morgan 01789 262 889 or david.morgan@vasa.org.uk

Jury is out on the Big Society

Voluntary and community organisations are in two minds about the Government's Big Society, according to a survey by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) of its membership.

Some 78 per cent believe it presents opportunities. But most feel it is "simply a reaffirmation of the voluntary and community action they have supported for decades" and there are concerns it will divert resources away from other activities.

A "significant majority of members see themselves playing a fundamental role in helping local people exert greater control over the planning system."

The "overwhelming majority would like to have a direct role in supporting local charities and community groups to save threatened local facilities." And over two-thirds of members would like to be involved in supporting local charities and community groups to help communities bid to take over local state-run services.

Says the report: "A number of members are concerned that local groups' capacity to take over public services will require considerable investment in time and money, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities.

"There is also concern about the Government's motives and aspirations for this area of the Big Society. If the goal is to use this as a cost-cutting exercise there is a danger of replacing paid professionals with uncoordinated, unregulated and untrained volunteers."

There are also concerns about proposals to train 5,000 new community organisers and the new National Citizens Service.

The majority of NAVCA members "are currently in a position to provide development support to people who wish to create and expand mutuals, cooperatives, charities and social enterprises. But there is concern that as funding cuts begin to bite this activity will suffer.

For those not already engaged in this activity, there is a feeling that it may become yet another demand on already stretched resources."

NAVCA members' priorities for the Big Society Bank are:

- Supporting and building upon the current voluntary and community sector infrastructure
- Providing resources for support and development of organisations to support grassroots activity
- Funding the existing network of organisations to make the Big Society happen
- Creating greater stability for voluntary and community organisations
- Recognising the importance of grants as well as loans

What Do You Think?

VASA's recent survey of its members gave a clear message that funding will be the biggest issue for the voluntary and community sector in the coming years. There are many other challenges facing local groups, however, including how to identify and manage collaboration opportunities with other organisations.

This has been the subject of recent discussions with Stratford upon Avon Town Trust, Warwickshire Rural Community Council, and Warwickshire Association of Local Councils. As a result of these discussions, a suggestion has been put forward that VASA, WRCC, WALC and the Town Trust could host a series of meetings based around each of the market towns in the District to look at these and other opportunities to help groups and clubs to survive the recession.

At the time of *"The Arden"* going to print the dates and locations were in the process of being finalised and an invitation will be sent to everyone on our mailing list as soon as possible.

To check to see whether you are included on our mailing list, please send an email to

enquiries@vasa.org.uk

or alternatively you can phone us on 01789 298115 to check.

Lifetime award for Peggie

Little did Peggie Baker realise when she took her daughter to a playgroup in 1965 that 45 years later she would still be involved with pre-school education – and winning a national lifetime achievement award for her work.



She was given the accolade at the Pre-school Learning Alliance's Volunteer Awards ceremony in London after being chosen from more than 100 nominations from across the country.

Peggie, who lives in Stratford, became involved with the Alliance when, after taking her daughter to a local playgroup, signed up as a volunteer in West London. She eventually ran the group before becoming the chair of its committee.

She has continued to be involved in pre-school activities since moving to Warwickshire. According to Pamela Baxter, chair of the Alliance's county committee:

"Over the past 45 years, Peggie's skills as a committed and hard-working ambassador for the Alliance have been tremendously wide-ranging, and Warwickshire has been hugely enriched by her presence".

Peggie's husband Donald is a VASA stalwart, especially well-known to volunteers for his work with the Information Point in Town Square, Stratford.

Sponsorship deal allows VASA to spread its wings

VASA and Seighford Investments have signed an agreement that will see the organisation staying at its offices in Arden Street, Stratford with substantially increased accommodation to expand its services to local voluntary and community groups and clubs.

The agreement involves Witney-based Seighford Investments – which owns Arden Court – making extra space available to VASA and also providing financial support towards its central costs.

As a result, VASA will take over three empty suites at Arden Court and increase its office accommodation from just under 2,000 square feet to over 7,000 square feet.

When asked about the new deal, Sophie Eld of Seighford Investments said:

“The current economic climate is proving a challenge to commercial and voluntary organisations alike.

“By working together, Seighford Investments and VASA have been able to create a robust arrangement, the benefits of which extend beyond the two organisations and out into the Stratford community.

“We’re pleased and excited to be part of this venture and to have the opportunity to help those who really need it.

“We understand that some local organisations face closure due to lack of operating space so it’s fantastic that we’re able to do something to help keep them running.



“VASA’s enthusiasm for this project is contagious. It’s our hope that this innovative solution will inspire others across the country.”

VASA Chief Executive Julia Phillips said: “This is a fantastic agreement for VASA – as well as for the voluntary and community sector as a whole, which will benefit as much as we will.

“We have been looking for bigger accommodation for some time, having outgrown the space we originally leased four and a half years ago – mainly because we need to accommodate more volunteers to run vital services like the volunteer drivers’ scheme. We have a small staff and are very dependent on volunteers working in our office.

“We have a meeting room which we use for providing training and make available to other groups. But it’s small and gets heavily booked and we haven’t been in a position to meet the demand for office space in the centre of Stratford.

“When we discussed the situation with Seighford’s Sophie Eld, she proposed a sponsorship agreement under which Seighford provides some financial support towards our costs and crucially, also the use of three empty offices at Arden Court.

“It means we stay where we are, in an ideal location with ample parking for our staff and volunteers, and visitors. We can spread our wings. And we can offer other groups vastly improved meeting space, ‘hot desking’ and other facilities. It is a win-win all round.”

Julia added: “Seighford’s sponsorship is an excellent example of partnership working between the commercial and voluntary sector to benefit the whole community – exactly that the Big Society is about.

“VASA receives very generous support from the county and district councils, and the Stratford Town Trust, without which we couldn’t survive. But with public finances under such heavy pressure, it’s incumbent on us to spread our net wider and find other sources of support.



“This is a truly innovative solution that solves our accommodation problems as well as enabling us to provide more services to the community. We are very grateful to Seighford Investments for being willing to support the voluntary and community sector in this way.”

Nadhim Zahawi MP was delighted to hear about the new arrangement and said:



“VASA and Seighford are to be congratulated on this agreement, and hopefully it will pave the way for other such ‘deals’ locally between the commercial and community sectors.

“Voluntary organisations are heavily dependent on public sector funding. With the public purse under so much pressure, it’s essential that voluntary organisations look for alternatives - and it’s essential the private sector steps forward to help with finance and in other imaginative ways.

“The agreement between VASA and Seighford is an excellent example of the way forward. I hope others in the commercial sector will take note and follow suit because we need a strong, financially secure voluntary and community sector”.



New Accommodation Hiring Information

With the new accommodation, VASA can offer the following services to voluntary and community groups and clubs.

- Hot desk with PC, printer, photocopier, wi-fi
- Permanent office accommodation with PC, printer, photocopier, wi-fi
- Permanent office accommodation – desk and storage space only
- Meeting room (up to 5 people)
- Meeting room (up to 14 people)
- Meeting room (up to 50 people)
- Rehearsal/studio space
- Storage space for display boards, equipment, etc.
- Any other office use (please contact us to discuss your needs)

Suites 3 and 5 are fully disability compliant; Suite 2 has stairway access and is not, therefore, suitable for hire to any group that requires full disability services.

Hire Charges

All rates have been set to provide a low-cost service for the voluntary and community sector. There are several categories, with the lowest rates for groups that have no paid staff and an income of less than £10,000 per annum. Some of the accommodation is available only during normal office hours whilst the main meeting and rehearsal room is available for evening and week-end hire as well as normal office hours.

For further information or to enquire about booking, please contact Grazyna on 01789 298115 or grazyna.hominiemcreek@vasa.org.uk.

Photos of Arden Court by David Morgan show two external views and some of the new internal accommodation available to community groups and clubs.

Going green to get fit the natural way

VASA has joined forces with SDC's Active Communities Team and Stratford Town Trust to develop an exciting new outdoor 'green gym' project.

Rather than weights and treadmills, it will involve the over-45s exercising their green fingers on an allotment plot – and will combine gardening with raising awareness of healthy eating.

Experts say that being outdoors in the fresh air and green space and in touch with nature brings with it many psychological and mental health benefits and an increased sense of wellbeing.

Paula Watson, SDC's Active Communities Officer says: "Imagine being part of a group doing gentle stretching on a lovely sunny day, listening to the wind in the trees, surrounded by wild flowers and butterflies, the scent of fragrant herbs

wafting on the breeze, followed by a delicious lunch of vegetable produce that you have the satisfaction of knowing that you cultivated yourself. Fabulous!"

The proposed plots of land, in Shottery Stratford, have been unused for many years due to their condition, location, access problems and other ecological factors.

VASA, which runs a separate community gardening project, is project managing the new 'Go Green' initiative.

It is also being supported by Warwickshire County Council's Community Development Fund, but local business sponsorship and a team of volunteers are still required to make the project a success and sustainable for the future.

Anyone interested in finding out more or want to know how to help, please contact Paula Watson on 01789 260648 or email paula.watson@stratford-dc.gov.uk



Dave Roberts (left) from Stratford Town Trust, Paula Watson from Stratford District Council, and VASA's Clive Faulkner, project manager, survey the site of the new green gym. Photo courtesy of Neville Collin, Stratford Observer.



STRATFORD DISTRICT
PARTNERSHIP

Action plan to boost Partnership

Stratford District Partnership has adopted a new action plan to strengthen its role in leading the statutory, private and voluntary sectors to work together to tackle key issues across the District.

The plan involves:

- approving six strategic issues it intends to pursue over the period 2010-2012. They are: creating balanced communities, promoting active communities, improving access to services, addressing fuel poverty, encouraging economic growth and addressing climate change/carbon reduction.
- recruiting more representatives from the private sector.
- pressing the county and district councils, police and health authority to provide "dedicated resources" to support its work.
- improving its performance management system.

The Partnership adopted the plan following report by an independent consultant who led a development workshop in April.

His report also said the Partnership needed to strengthen its links with town and parish councils, the six community forums in the District and other partnership groups.

Overall, the Partnership "is well structured and has clear governance arrangements in place. It has clear leadership from the Chair and good engagement across all key stakeholders. Strong and positive relationships seem to exist which augurs well for the development of SDP in to the future."

* Charles Goody and Alan Bartlett have been re-elected Chair and vice-Chair of the Partnership.



The Loft is revamped, reinvigorated

A major restructuring at VASA's "The Loft" project has led to the project breaking records for its furniture recycling service and significantly broadening its activities for service users – people with or recovering from mental problems

Now in its 11th year, The Loft collects unwanted, donated furniture and white goods from homes throughout the District and then redistributes them to families in need.

Earlier this year it was revamped to focus on supporting its service users – and improving efficiency in recycling furniture and electrical goods. The changes have paid off handsomely.

The recycling service has been improved, including replacing its old van with a newer, environmentally friendly vehicle (supported by Warwickshire County Council), to achieve a more efficient turnaround of donated items.

Clerical support has been moved to the VASA office to free up space at the workshop premises to provide more craft opportunities for the service users.

When funds permit there are plans to purchase new tools to increase the range of skills offered to service users, e.g. a wood turning machine to make bowls.

The recruitment of two new support workers means the workshop can now open daily for longer hours, instead of only three mornings a week.

Service users are still encouraged to learn carpentry skills and make bird boxes, bird tables and other items from wood, but the new staff and space has enabled the expansion of a wide range of arts and crafts activities including painting, stencilling, etching, mosaics, sculptures, concept art, designing and jewellery making.

Previously these activities were on offer to a group for vulnerable women that meets every Wednesday afternoon, but are now available to all service users.

Plans are well-advanced to run an outreach service taking activities to day care centres, youth clubs, and care homes and consideration is being given to running activities for young people during school vacation weeks.

Says Grazyna Hominiec-Meek, VASA's Finance and Administration Manager: "Last year was The Loft's 10th anniversary and it was timely to take stock of where it was and where we want it to be. We have no doubt the services it provides will continue to be needed.

"The recycling service has been in huge demand since the restructure, and with the new scheduling process in place we are now delivering items almost as soon as they are collected."

The Loft urgently needs surplus household items such as electrical goods, sofas, beds, chest of drawers and small wardrobes in order to keep pace with the demand. Contact Grazyna Hominiec-Meek on 01789 298115.

RAWM CEO honoured



Sharon Palmer, Chief Executive of Regional Action West Midlands (RAWM) was made an MBE in the Honours List for her charitable work.

Julia Phillips, VASA Chief Executive and a member of the RAWM Board, said: "We are delighted for Sharon - it's richly deserved.

"RAWM's current success and leadership of the voluntary and community sectors in the West Midlands would not have been possible without Sharon's drive and determination, and total commitment to the local communities within the region".

Sharon said: "I am pleased to receive this award on behalf of my current team at RAWM, and those colleagues I have worked with and alongside".

Support for Parish Plans

Stratford District Council is keen to support parish plans and when involved in the early stages of preparing them can offer parishes a range of help and advice.

VASA's Parish Plan Project Manager, David Morgan, can also assist parishes that have a Plan in place, but need advice and support in delivering the outcomes of the plan or wish to undertake a review to refresh the plan.

A database of issues extracted from all of the District Parish Plans has recently been updated and is available for any Parish Council to consult.

- The Planning Policy Team can offer advice and help on SDC policies, corporate plan etc and expectations for community involvement.
- Read and provide feedback on draft surveys, reports, parish plans and action plans.
- Help and advise with the design and format of surveys and questionnaires.
- Supply demographic and other information about the parish and district as needed.
- Provide advice on how to prepare a Parish Plan.
- Liaise on the Parish Council's behalf with other useful contacts within SDC.
- Help and advise with printing the Plan once it has been completed.

If parishes wish to have their plans adopted by the District Council a draft copy of the final version needs to be submitted to the Planning Policy Team at least six weeks before it goes before consideration by the relevant area committees.

If you would like more information and advice, please contact SDC's Planning Policy Officer Fiona Blundell on 01789 260333 or David Morgan at VASA on 01789 262889.

The first six months of 2010 saw a further big increase in the number of new volunteers registering with the Centre, up by around 40% on last year's figures.

Fortunately this has been matched by an increase in the number of new volunteering opportunities being registered, taking the 'rolling total' of available opportunities up to around 240. These increases look set to continue.

Working in partnership with the other Volunteer Centres in Warwickshire work continues towards applying for the latest round of Quality Accreditation with Volunteering England in September 2010.

The Accreditation focuses on the six core functions of being a Volunteer Centre – Volunteer Brokerage, Marketing, Good Practice Development, Developing Volunteering Opportunities, Policy Response and Campaigning and the Strategic Development of Volunteering.

Many good things are coming out of the process including the sharing of resources and establishment of best practice across the County.

South Warwickshire Volunteering Forum has a programme of training events for autumn 2010, including Effective Volunteer Management, Diversity and Equal Opportunities and Juggling Commitments.

Membership of the Forum is free to anyone co-ordinating or managing volunteers. In addition to regular training events the Forum provides a wealth of advice, guidance and best practice on all things related to volunteer management.

If you're a volunteer co-ordinator or manager and not already a member, please contact the Volunteer Centre for a registration form.

We continue to work with the local Job Centre to place people who've been unemployed for between six and twelve months into suitable voluntary work.

This national scheme has seen over 100 people referred to us since summer 2009 and we've placed people into voluntary roles as diverse as gardening, computer support, marketing, driving and book-keeping.

The aim of the scheme is to help get people 'work ready', raise their confidence and self-esteem and give them new skills. The scheme is due to continue until March 2011.

'Stuart Copeland began work as Volunteer Centre Assistant in August, coming through the Future Jobs Fund.

The Fund, which gives young people a six month paid work placement so they can acquire new skills and experience of the work environment, has so far seen four people placed with VASA. As well as giving them new skills, their contribution to our work has been invaluable.

Food, glorious food – thanks to VASA volunteers

Clive Faulkner, Project Manager for VASA's Community Gardening Project, faced an unusual problem: what to do with the bumper crop of vegetables his team of volunteers had produced at the Stratford Town Community Allotment.

The solution was to share them with Lower Meadow Day Centre, Springfield MIND, Sheltered Housing and Age Concern.

Says Clive: "It was a nice problem to have, and we were delighted to solve it by giving the veggies to four very worthwhile causes."

"The volunteers deserve great credit. The allotment is an excellent area for training new volunteers especially if they are recovering from mental health problems and would like to gain confidence and learn new skills."



Left to right Vicky Marsden, Age Concern Cook, Denise Milstein, Age Concern Co-ordinator and Peter Rees Volunteer

Vetting and Barring Scheme registration halted

The government has stopped registration with the Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) to allow the scheme to be remodelled “back to proportionate, common sense levels.”

Voluntary registration with the VBS for new employees and job-movers working or volunteering with children and vulnerable adults was due to start on 26 July. This registration has now been stopped.

Home Secretary Theresa May said: “The safety of children and vulnerable adults is of paramount importance to the new government.

“However it is also vital that we take a measured approach in these matters. We’ve listened to the criticisms and will respond with a scheme that has been fundamentally remodelled. Vulnerable groups must be properly protected in a way that is proportionate and sensible. This redrawing of the vetting and barring scheme will ensure this happens.”

Children’s Minister Tim Loughton said: “Protecting vulnerable children is a top priority. Any vetting system should not be a substitute for proper vigilance by individuals and society. At the moment we think the pendulum has swung too far.

“We shouldn’t be driving a wedge between children and well-meaning adults including people coming forward to volunteer with young people. Such individuals should be welcomed, encouraged, and helped as much as possible, unless it can be shown that children would not be safe in their care.”

Care Services Minister Paul Burstow said: “Protecting the most vulnerable people in society is a basic duty of any government. While we must be confident that the systems we have in place are up to the job, we must also be sure that they are proportionate. We will look in detail at what should be done to ensure that the scheme meets both these tests.”

The VBS is designed to protect children and vulnerable adults by preventing those who pose a known risk from gaining access to them through their work.

Existing arrangements under the scheme will continue. They include the following:

- since January 2009, the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) has been making independent barring decisions. It will continue to maintain two constantly updated lists, one for those barred from working with children, the other for those barred from working with vulnerable adults

- existing requirements concerning Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks will remain in place, and those entitled to such checks can continue to apply for them

- employers are still legally obliged to refer information to the ISA if they have moved or removed an individual because they have harmed or there is a risk of harm to a member of a vulnerable group.

New handbook for volunteer drivers

VASA’s volunteer drivers are now in possession of their new Volunteer Driving Handbook produced by the Warwickshire Voluntary Transport, the recently formed grouping of volunteer driver schemes in the county.

The handbook covers all relevant volunteer driving information, now standardised across the five county schemes. The drivers also have a separate Guide Book giving details of VASA’s own scheme.

The county partnership means that all new volunteer drivers must have a good driving record and at least three years’ experience, together with a CRB check. They can also use the new Warwickshire Voluntary Transport Logo while on duty.



Volunteer Driver John Jackson with the new handbook

Community Forums

Have your say about local priorities and issues.

Community forums are local meetings which offer a straightforward way for residents to put their views and concerns about local issues directly to public service providers.

Public service partners that are involved in community forums include:

- Local councillors
- Warwickshire County Council
- district and borough councils
- Warwickshire Police
- local health services
- and local community groups.

VASA is a key partner in each Community Forum and staff are in attendance to provide advice and information to support voluntary and community groups and clubs in each locality.

Information about upcoming community forum meetings and minutes from past meetings is available for each locality area across the county.

The next round of Forum meetings will take place as follows:

ALCESTER/BIDFORD (Surgery 6.30pm, Forum 7.30pm) - Tuesday 21 September, Welford Primary School, Welford-on-Avon

HENLEY-IN-ARDEN/STUDLEY (Surgery 7.00pm, Forum 7.30pm) - Thursday 7 October, Studley Youth Club

WELLESBOURNE/KINETON (Surgery 6.30pm, Forum 7.00pm) - Thursday 9 September, Wellesbourne Primary School

SOUTHAM/FELDON (Surgery 6.30pm, Forum 7.15pm) - Wednesday 6 October, Southam Primary School

SHIPSTON/STOUR (Surgery 6.30pm, Forum 7.00pm) - Tuesday 7 September, Shipston High School

STRATFORD (Surgery 5.00pm, Forum 5.30pm) - Wednesday 15 September 2010, Stratford-upon-Avon High School

Older people hit hard by recession says report

A new survey has found that the recession is having a serious impact on older people across Warwickshire, including in the Stratford District.

Undertaken by Warwickshire Citizens Advice Bureaux and Warwickshire Trading Standards Service, it found that not only are they having difficulty in paying for essentials such as gas, electricity and food, they are hit by the hidden costs they incur as parents and grandparents.

Pensioners are particularly vulnerable to rising prices when living on a low fixed income and many rely on income from savings to pay for essential services and utilities at a time when interest rates are at an all-time low.

Rather than seek help, the older generation are historically more inclined to conceal any financial deprivation they are experiencing from their families and to soldier on. As a result their problems remain hidden from the community at large.

Some 182 people, aged 60 and over, responded to the survey - 52 from Stratford-upon-Avon.

The report is available from Marilyn Price, Volunteer Social Policy Co-ordinator, Stratford-upon-Avon CAB on 01789 295399 or Marilyn.Price@stratforduponavoncab.org.uk

Have your say on older people's services

Warwickshire County Council is holding two public events in the Stratford District to give voluntary and community organisations the opportunity to have their say on older people's services.

They are part of a countywide consultation on the Director of Public Health's Annual Report on Older People - and the feedback will contribute to shaping future services for older people.

The events will take place on Wednesday 22nd September at HRI Wellesbourne and on Tuesday 19th October at Shipston High School

National Volunteers' Week a big success

National Volunteers' Week was a big success in the Stratford District and elsewhere in south Warwickshire.

A special roadshow promoting the benefits of volunteering and encouraging people to give up their time for local causes drew considerable interest when it called at the Maybird Centre in Stratford (see photo), Royal Priors in Leamington and Clock Towers in Rugby.

Charles Barlow, VASA's Volunteer Centre Manager, said: "The event was a huge success. Information on volunteering was handed out to over 1400 people and the profile of volunteering locally has been raised.

The roadshow was organised by South Warwickshire Volunteering Forum. It represents the interests of several hundred VCS organisations and over 20,000 volunteers.

National Volunteers' Week takes place June 1-7 every year and is promoted by Volunteering England, the umbrella body of Volunteer Centres across England.



Open Day at SDC

Stratford District Council is throwing its doors open in September to give residents the opportunity to see what it does.

The Open Day - at Elizabeth House on Thursday 23 September from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. - is the first time the Council has "opened itself up" to the public in this way.

A SDC spokesman said: "We want people to come into the offices to talk to staff, see what they do and get to understand our services better".

Magnificent Seven to ride again?

Cue Elmer Bernstein's famous film score - the Magnificent Seven could be heading for your town or village.

VASA is looking for a team of retail 'gurus' to use their experience and expertise to help kick start new rural businesses, perhaps run as community enterprises.

David Morgan, VASA's Rural Outreach Manager, explains: "We are looking to hold a daylong seminar where anyone thinking of starting a new business can have their ideas assessed by a panel of business experts as a prelude to directing them to the more conventional business support systems.

"We are looking for any idea for a new business - from manufacturing to media, retail to restoration, craft to computing.

"Hopefully the experts we recruit will stay involved beyond the event. Retired people will be best as they'll have no ongoing 'business' considerations of their own and no conflicts of interest. But all will be considered and those with on-going businesses will of course have connections that will be very useful."

When the date is fixed David intends to ask all towns and parishes to promote the event through their websites, newsletters and posters.

"New enterprises will have a huge part to play in reviving the rural economy and we must make sure that no opportunity gets overlooked", he says.

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