

**Charles Booth Centre – Annual general Meeting – 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021**  
**Report from the Chair**

At the last AGM back in January 2020 I am sure nobody would have thought that the rest of the year would have brought the huge amount of change, upheaval and at times sadness that it has. Little did we know that COVID-19 was hurtling its way towards all of us, turning our lives upside down, and it will come as no surprise to hear that the Centre has been affected hugely as well.

January and February 2020 promised so much opportunity for the Centre and we were all most excited at the prospect of the year to come. Another year has passed since we had become an independent Charitable Incorporated Organisation and event numbers were up including five weddings, user group numbers were up and we were feeling most positive about the year to come. As February turned into March however the situation changed dramatically. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March the first national lockdown was announced and on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, the Charles Booth Centre closed its doors and this would reflect most of the year to come.

We also had to be sensible employers and given our duties of care to our staff, we immediately made steps to enter the furlough scheme so that our staff's jobs were protected as far as possible.

But being closed to our regular user groups did not necessarily mean that we had to be closed to our community. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March we had a meeting with some of the local business leaders, trustees from the Centre, our Centre manager and Emma Trahearn head of the community focus team at NWLDC. At this point it was not a matter of getting things right or wrong, it was simply a matter of getting things done. As the community centre for Thringstone and surrounding villages, we felt strongly that we needed to represent our community and do what we could to help.

Within one week of the lockdown we had more than 35 volunteers assisting Tom and we leafleted almost every house in Thringstone with a flyer setting out services that we were offering the community together with useful numbers for people to call. More than 2000 were handed out in total. As time went by our village began to truly respond and very quickly we had a team of over 70 volunteers helping to carry out such tasks as friendly phone calls, prescription collections, food shopping, running errands, delivering community bags provided most kindly from Morrison's and also the odd bit of DIY and dog walking!

March right through till June really saw a huge amount of volunteering carried out at the Centre. We were absolutely delighted to be part of the community response and to ensure that for the first time in a long time our community centre was at the centre of our community.

But that wasn't all that was going on at the Centre at this time. As many of you will be aware from our AGM last year, we were embarking on a series of ambitious projects for renovating, redecorating and altering the usable space at the Centre. As the furlough scheme kicked in, we were blessed with exceptional volunteering and as a result the wall between the middle and end rooms was removed, the new openable partition was installed and new flooring laid. Following that a comprehensive program of redecoration was undertaken and a large number of routine electrical rewiring and health and safety tasks were completed. A big thank you to Tony Dandy, Hywel Tidley, Lydia Clark-Betts and our own May and Carole too for all their efforts here, not to forget the students of Loughborough University who came out on mass, shortly before lockdown to help us get off to a flying start!

Even this is not the pinnacle of the Centre's highlights for this year however. With the help of Geoffrey and Pauline Walker, our fundraising for the Mobility Lift at the Centre really took off. Many of you may not know, but Geoff and Pauline are something of an online social media sensation. In fact they have well over 300,000 followers on Instagram. Geoff very kindly offered to do a series of posts to his followers to see if he could raise a little bit of money for us. The response was really rather overwhelming. In the space of less than six months our crowdfunding platform swelled from £250 to a little under £22,000. We have been left absolutely stunned not only by the power of social media and Geoff's incredible followers, but also by the huge diversity of where donations came from. We have had donations from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and all around the globe with most people leaving lovely comments about how Geoff and Pauline were touching their lives. I would just like to say a very heartfelt thank you to Geoff and Pauline for all of their kindness and support and I don't think I am over exaggerating when I say that without them, we would not be in a position to put a lift into the Centre at this point. We have also received some very generous donations from local residents and other parties. We hope that as life settles down in 2021, Geoff and Pauline will honour us by attending the opening of our lift and having the first ride in it. We have obtained planning permission and are talking to contractors so hope to be commencing work soon.

You might remember that we lost the pre-school group in 2019 but I am pleased to say that in July 2020 a new pre-school group opened at the Centre under the stewardship of Alison and John Simpson. It has been wonderful to have the children and staff bringing the Centre back to life once more and we wish them all the very best of luck as they go forward into their venture with us.

The preschool was not the only new group to join us during the year. We have Ballroom Dancing, Junior Cheerleading, Mother & Baby Yoga, a new Lunch Club and even welcomed Bhangra dancing to the Centre for the first time. However in amongst these highlights and good news there is the harsh reality of COVID-19. With the exception of our new pre-school we have largely been forced to close our doors to our regular users again and as such the impact of the coronavirus has been huge on the Centre, both financially and as a focus point for our community. We have been fortunate to secure a couple of community grants that have helped to keep the Centre ticking over however the finances for the year 2020 and into 2021 will look very bleak at best.

I do not want to end my final report as chair of the trustees of the Charles Booth Centre on a low note however and instead would point to the fact that in many ways over the past two years the Centre has gone from strength to strength. It has been wonderful to see the Centre doing so much for our community at a time of real need and the cards and thank you notes received show that we really have made a most positive impact in a very difficult time. As the vaccination program increases and continues we look forward to a more normal second half of 2021 and to welcoming new, regular and public users back to the Centre as soon as it is safe to do so.

On behalf of the board of trustees I would like to thank you all for your continued support and interest in the Charles Booth Centre and wish you and your families all the very best for the coming months. Please stay safe and look after one another.

CHAIR