



HIGH WEALDEN COMMUNITY NETWORK

Supporting Young Children and Families Crowborough Children's Centre

Thursday 11th July 2019

The 10th High Wealden Community Network was attended by 24 people from local community groups. We are very grateful to staff at the centre for hosting the network, especially on a day when they also had to show important visitors around as part of the review of their service.

Crowborough Children's Centre

Sam Yeates from the Children's Centre Keywork Team described the service they offer to families with multiple and complex problems. By providing earlier, coordinated support the service aims to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of children, young people and families to help them achieve good outcomes. Sam explained how the keyworkers work in partnership with the whole family for an extended period of time, identifying issues and strengths and agreeing priorities for change. Together they create clear action plans enabling the family to take small, but significant, steps towards meeting their goals. Sam opened the floor to questions and there was a wide response, particularly from people asking how their organisations might work collaboratively with the team, especially around issues of mental health and caring responsibilities.

This was followed by Donna McAdam, Children’s Centre Manager who gave an overview of the children’s centres and the wide range of support they can offer including parenting skills, child health information, antenatal and newborn advice and volunteer and community drop-in sessions such as ‘Explore and Play’. There was particular focus on the training courses and volunteering opportunities provided to improve life skills and/or help parents back to work. Donna cited several examples of how this support has benefited struggling families and led to improvements in the lives of families in ‘most need’.

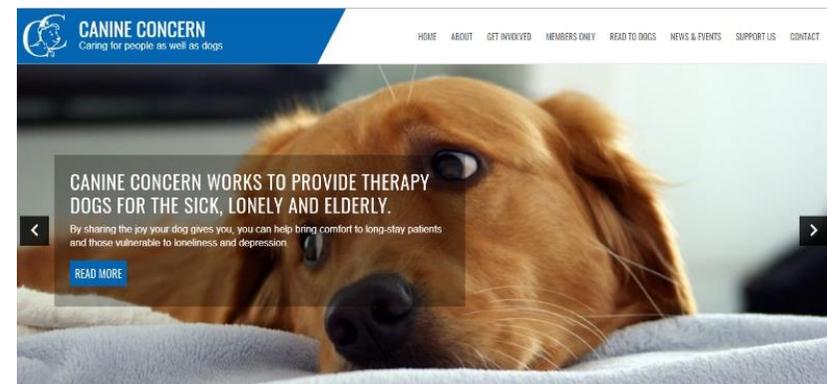
Several children’s centres, including Crowborough, are currently earmarked for closure and the potential impact this would have on families and young children locally was discussed. People wishing to comment on the proposed changes to early help services can complete the public consultation survey using the link below. [The consultation is open until July 29th 2019.](#)

Networking

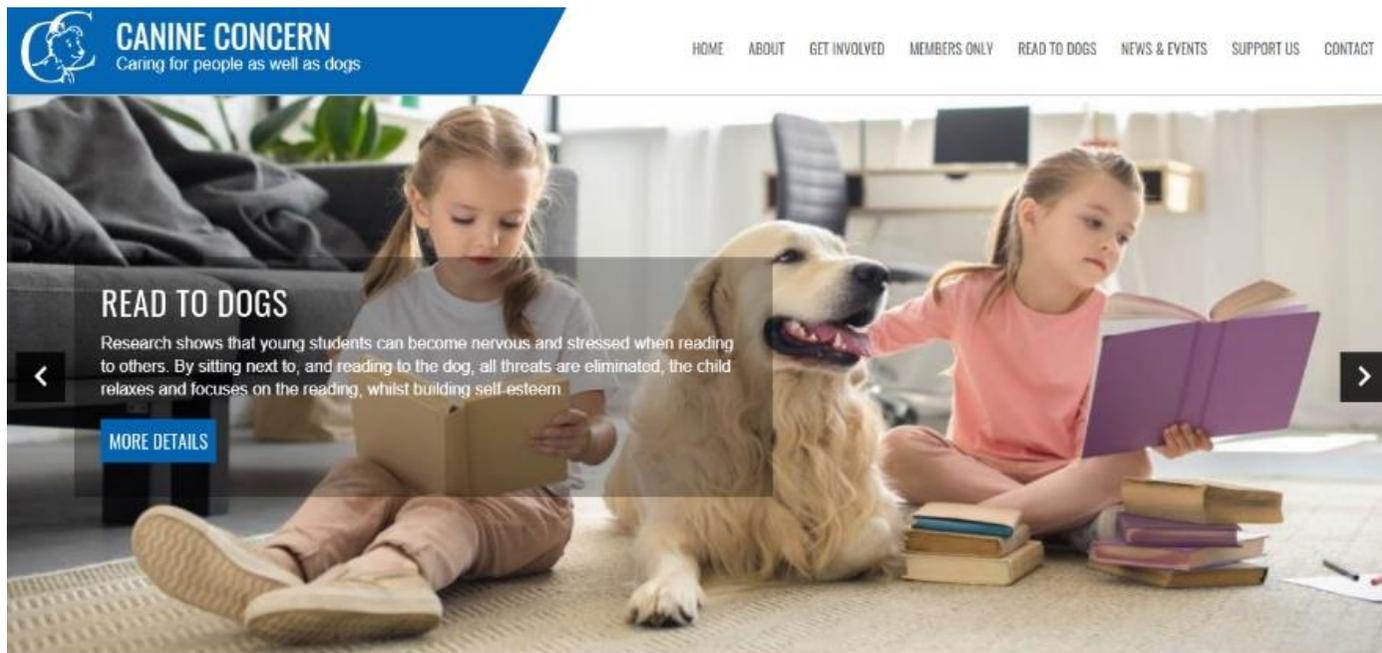
Participants had a chance to introduce themselves, describe what they did and share contact details (a list will be circulated separately).

Canine Concern

We were joined by an Eastbourne-based charity that now has branches throughout England and Wales. It is rapidly increasing its membership. Valerie described the challenges of establishing a successful charity and had kind words to say about the help she and her team had received from 3VA in this process. Getting the structure right has helped the charity grow and offer its services to a wide range of groups.



Canine Concern cares for people as well as dogs. Volunteers come forward with their pets and are vetted to make sure both human and dog have the temperament to undertake this skilled work. Training and support are given to help volunteers interact with people in lots of different settings to bring a bit of fun and comfort. It benefits the dogs and the people they meet. Valerie drew our attention to scientific studies that measured heart rates and other stress indicators to demonstrate the health benefits. As soon as the dogs came into the hall, participants immediately began interacting with our well-behaved guests. A volunteer, Chrissie, works in schools. Her lived experience of hearing loss has made her an ideal person to work with deaf children and get them to practice their sign language skills by giving commands to her dog. They get to choose which trick he shows them at the end of the session and give him treats.





Konnor



Savannah

Canine Concern gives a very good volunteering experience to a range of people and dogs. Arrangements are now underway for the dogs to and owners to take up the many invitations to visit Crowborough groups in the near future.

The photos above show two of Canine Concern's therapy dogs, Konnor left and Savannah on the right. Savannah is 10 years old, and Connor is 9 months, so two ends of the spectrum! Benji the black dog also joined us

If you would like to get involved with Canine Concern, [the link is here](#).

Network Successes

Following from the network in Uckfield on Young People in November 2018, it was suggested that it would be useful to put all the legal information with examples of good practice and young people's experiences together in the one guide. The Young People and Volunteering East Sussex Guide has been produced in collaboration with the volunteering hubs, 3VA, ESCC and voluntary groups across Sussex. A digital copy has been sent out to you as part of this follow up. It will shortly be available on the 3VA website.

Listen-Hear

We had hoped to hear from two outstanding local groups who work with families in Crowborough, but both needed to attend to urgent matters.

Listen Hear works in Beacon School and supports families who are experiencing difficulties. The review of children's centres meant that Angela Kirby was called away to help demonstrate the work they do. However, she says get in touch with her and check out the [Facebook page here](#).



Baby2Baby

Baby2baby is a new group but has rapidly expanded to fulfil a need for baby bundles and essentials for new parents. They are now helping provide the same service for older children too. This is a great example of a local mum stepping up to help people at a time of their greatest need. Hannah Powell the founder, could not be with us as she had to stay with her young son who was too ill to come and meet us all today. Get well soon! For more information [see this PDF](#).



Ideas for future networks – the snowball fight

We wrote down short ideas for future networks, scrunched them up and threw them at each other. We then read out the idea that we had picked up. The ideas are below.

Training and Learning

- Volunteering everybody struggles to recruit volunteers – joined up approach across High Weald
- Involving mental health and wellbeing in presentations
- Volunteering opportunities
- Include 5/10 min presentations from member groups at each meeting or batch groups covering similar service users
- Include occasional ½ hour training session on key topics identified by members
- Funding information
- Training tasters

Collaboration

- Collaborate with other networks meeting organisations
- Arts based projects
- Making the most of parish council networks
- Continue involving projects in hosting networks and doing presentations
- Bring voluntary groups in north Wealden together to share resources, especially human resources
- Liaise with town councils/Wealden District Council to help
- Linking services together
- Sharing resources
- Partnership working to achieve a community goal e.g. youth club in Jarvis Brook/Alderbrook area
- Create better link ups to other groups that are relevant
- Look at how the new link workers and primary care networks could affect the voluntary sector
- Connect with companies/organisations who would like to offer services/expertise/equipment to charities for free

Contacts

- An active list of contact details updated regularly of all organisations involved through e-mail
- Introductions at start of meeting
- To continue to offer an opportunity to network with volunteer and community members in a constructive way around specific topics

Sharing information

- Use Uckfield Wellbeing Centre as a venue
- Have an evening network? To encourage non-professionals to attend
- Look at identifying a few key areas that need support in the local community and working as a network to work out how to improve or facilitate this action
- Encourage younger volunteers to get involved
- Raise awareness of services offered
- Share successful fundraising events /sources
- Expand network through using village halls
- What's on in your area similar to the event in Hailsham
- Expand with other organisations that cusp the area
- Continue with opportunities to hear about different organisations
- Great networking time
- More time for networking- allow questions to make better connections for after the meetings

Things that were enjoyed

- Really enjoy format, e.g. chat, intro, activity
- Continue focussing on issues/success identified in previous networks
- Remain community focussed
- Really enjoyed walking network [at the Hailsham and Polegate Community Network in June] and felt that was a great way to develop ideas

After we shared these ideas

In the discussion that followed it was agreed that we would try to set up mini training sessions on attracting and retaining volunteers and on fundraising. As trainees have trouble accessing training on the coast, it was suggested that the potential learners could host a training event in their space. Please contact Martina Taylor Training Manager at 3VA, she will be delighted to bring the training to you and your organisation if you can provide the venue and get people to sign up. Please e mail her with what you need, and we will see if we can get a course set up. Her email address is martina.taylor@3va.org.uk. Suggestions for training were trustee essentials, and a guide to social media.

It was suggested that it would be good to hold a “Question Time” style event with a panel of experts to answer questions and give information.

There will be a “super network” taking place on 24th Sept at the Speak Up Forum’s Big Event in Eastbourne where there will be an opportunity to meet with groups from across Sussex and beyond. The event is focussed on asset-based development with practical advice: “Knowing Your Assets from Your Elbow”. Details will be available soon, [watch this space](#).

Evaluation and Feedback

Thank you so much for your comments, they are really appreciated.

Time and space to network was an important point that was raised, as well as having more participatory activities such as a walking meeting or visiting another community asset. Many people valued meeting other organisations and sharing contact details, and many also intend to follow up with contacts made after the meeting.

We had great feedback for Canine Concern, all very positive and many intend to collaborate with them in the future.

An important point that was raised was that more training needs to be available in the north of the county, and perhaps mini training sessions could be part of the networks.

Thank you!

