The Future of our Day Support Services

We are a local charity that has provided services and support for older generations, their families and their communities in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly for over 45 years. All the funding we receive is spent on local people and local services and although we belong to a national network of Age UKs, that ensures a quality of service, our charity is served by local people for local people with all finance raised locally.

Over the last 4 years, the income our charity receives from grants, local authority and health contracts has reduced by over 50%. Simply put, we have lost money that supported older people in our county accessing information and advice, advocacy, home care, transport, falls prevention, mental health support, coordination and navigation.

As a direct result of funding pressures, on the 1st November 2016, we embarked on a 12 month restructure programme to create a sustainable future for our charity and increase the reach of our valuable countywide services. We are concerned that services for older people are poorly funded, structured and commissioned and due to the endless short-term decisions to reduce public funding for preventative services and ongoing austerity measures, we took a proactive decision to secure our own long term future.

That has meant months of reviewing all our services, consulting with all our staff, partners and people who use our services. Sadly, we have closed some of our services, lost some wonderful staff and volunteers but we have also launched new, more cost effective alternatives: Our Helpline service supporting over 500 people a month; our service consultants offering bespoke care planning to those that are most vulnerable; our volunteer coordinators supporting over 200 volunteers; practical help around gardening and home support.

The review process continues with our focus on Day Care Services. This includes our current building-based day care in Falmouth, St Austell, Truro & Newquay. It also takes in a review of the potential community based day support we want to create in small villages, community centres, pubs and cafés to increase access to vital support and companionship for our older generation.
Our Consultation

Three of our day services, Truro, Falmouth and Newquay, are hosted in buildings owned by Cornwall Council. Up until this year, the buildings were rent free and we were responsible for maintaining the equipment inside the building. Cornwall Council had a responsibility to maintain the fabric of the centres but their own budgetary pressures have seen a reduction in the ongoing maintenance, resulting in a significant decline in the condition of the properties. This has particularly affected the Truro building.

We are currently not consulting on the future of our other day services but we are mindful that some of the same issues that affect Truro, such as the lease and new contract arrangements, will affect the others. We continue to look at all options for all day support and are in discussion with Cornwall Council about these concerns.

This year we have a perfect storm of challenges. It is proposed that the leasing arrangements for the day centre buildings are changed, placing the upkeep of the fabric of the buildings on Age UK Cornwall & The Isles of Scilly as tenants. Additionally, changes to health and safety require the buildings to undergo further maintenance. Until this year, Cornwall Council also guaranteed funding for places within the centres, which last year helped support 363 people. The contract for places is no longer secure and through the new commissioning arrangements we have no guarantee of income, the cost of care continues to rise and the transport costs increase too.

These issues impact on our Truro day centre more than the others. It is a building that is hard to adapt or flex to changing needs, it requires transport to bring most people in and it needs considerable maintenance. Over the last 5 years, Truro day centre has cost £64,500 more than the income it received. We have funded this through donations, legacies and reserves. This year it is projected to be nearly £30,000 short of the income it needs. We have also seen a considerable decline in numbers of people wanting to attend Truro, with a 49% decrease in people who fund their own care and support.

We began a review process of the future of Truro day centre in August and asked for views thoughts, concerns and challenges to help us carefully consider the future of this centre. What we received back was passionate, compassionate and mostly supportive. Many understood the reasons for the consultation and expressed concern about the impact of the decision. We listened to emotional stories from individuals, their families and local people about what the Truro day centre means to them. The sense of family, of companionship and the feeling of belonging and love. We have been humbled by the stories of exemplary care from our staff team and volunteers and amazed by the range of activities people have benefited from. We have talked to our staff teams and volunteers about the impact the centre has on them, their families and livelihood’s. The consultation has not been easy, and we have been accused of only looking at financial issues; of not understanding the needs of older people and some have questioned whether a decision had already been made.
Our Decision

It has been a moving consultation and a decision that none of us wants to make. But as Trustees and as a senior management team, our duty is to review all information and take the best decision we can based not just on the future of the centre, and the wellbeing of those who attend it and work in it, but the long term financial viability of our charity now and for the future of older generations to come.

The Trustees and senior management team met on 26th September 2017 to review all the comments, the stories and the financial position. We discussed in detail whether to continue the Truro centre as it currently stands or put our efforts and resources into creating an alternative.

The decision was made by the Trustees to close Truro Day Centre and this decision was not one that we ever wanted to make. We carefully considered and debated continuing the centre and the possibility that we can try and close the financial gap for this year. Many wonderful people have offered to fundraise, campaign and support the day centre, and between us we are sure we could keep the centre open for a while longer. However, the projections indicate that we will be back in this position in 12 months’ time and that we will just continue the uncertainty about the day centre and put the Charity at risk of further financial challenge.

Therefore, we have decided to place our energies and available resources into providing day support to the older generations of Truro and surrounding areas by developing more viable and local alternatives, and to close the current centre. We hope that by extending our reach and funding new venues we can continue to support those who currently attend and open doors to new people who may have previously been unable to access the Truro centre. The closure is not imminent and we will be open to the end of November 2017 to take time to find alternatives that suit even our most vulnerable people and we will be working with everyone to try and find something that suits their needs and desires.

We are searching for alternatives now and are being supported and helped by many organisations and individuals from Cornwall Rural Community Charity, Truro City Council, Cornwall Council, Café Chaos and St Austell Brewery to name just a few. We are asking the people who currently use our services and our staff & volunteers to help us test out new ideas, venues and opportunities. We hope to have several up and running in the next few weeks and welcome any thoughts, offers of support and help to achieve this. It is our intention to keep as many people together, with a strong focus on offering alternatives that may not be the same as Truro day centre but can offer a safe, supportive and stimulating environment, accessible to more in the community.

We welcome any new enquiries for day support in Truro, or any of our other day centres, and will be able to discuss your needs and what we can offer – for further information about any of our services ring our Helpline on 01872 266383.