

MILL NEWS

Summer 2009

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Tall ships challenge

In April, ten young men set off from Romsey Mill for a five-day sailing trip from Portsmouth around the Isle of Wight, supported by the Rank Foundation. Part of a group we run at Manor Community College, the young men were able to develop team and leadership skills, confidence and a fresh perspective from the top of the rigging.

It was a step into the unknown for all of the young men, entered into with some trepidation. However, the trip was a great success. The group all learnt a great deal about themselves, and developed many skills, including getting to grips with ropes, sails and the helm. They were determined to succeed and left the 72ft yacht with a great sense of team spirit and personal achievement.

One young man was determined to learn as many knots as he could, and

then teach others. Another was keen to learn how to trim the sails and give the orders to those pulling the ropes and using the winches. Many of the tasks on the boat require everyone to work together and pull their weight, so it was excellent for the development of teamwork.

Romsey Mill's Children & Youth Work Programme Manager, James Bennett, said, "It was great to see the lads rise to the challenge. We all learnt a huge amount about sailing and about what we could achieve together."

Residential experiences like these help young people to develop a belief that they can meet challenges successfully, with the right attitude and support. It's a belief we will be looking to foster through an extensive residential programme this summer.



Wedding bells!

Ruth Woods, Aspire Coordinator and Young Women's Worker, is now Mrs Ruth Watt. She and Alex got married in May. Congratulations!

Children's Centre developments

New groups planned from September 2009:

- Music and singing (weekday afternoons)
- Messy play (weekday afternoons)
- Physical play, snack and story session (Saturday am, half-termly)

Mobile information desk open in the ground floor foyer, 10am – 2pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Summer's here

Summer is here and for Romsey Mill this means that, in addition to our ongoing work, we are developing some special opportunities with children and young people. These include local trips and activities, and excursions further afield to places in the Lake District, Norfolk, Derbyshire and Somerset. Many of the children and young people we work with would not otherwise benefit from such positive opportunities.

Alongside the children, young people and families, it is the Mill's staff team that makes Romsey Mill what it is. In the last edition of Mill news I mentioned the names of people joining the team. Following up on that I thought readers would like to see photographs of Mike Farrington (SIP Youth Development Worker, North Cambridge) and Lucy Stephens (Children's Centre Admin Support) who are both now in situ and beginning to do some great work.



Another new staff member, Judith Cork, will be joining Romsey Mill in August. Judith is moving from

Kent, where she helped establish and develop a community youth project, and will be working within our Young Parents Programme (YPP) as an Outreach and Engagement Worker. Judith will provide 1:1 support and home visiting to young women referred to the programme, encouraging them to engage in YPP and local Children's Centres.

Judith needs to find some accommodation for a few months whilst she gets to know Cambridge and looks for something longer-term. If any *Mill News* readers could welcome a lodger, or help in another way, we would be very grateful if you would contact us.

Next year is Romsey Mill's 30th anniversary. We will be planning some special events and activities to mark the occasion. If you, or someone you know, would like to participate in events but you don't think we already have contact details please get in touch so we can let you know what is happening as the plans unfold. We want to catch up with old friends and establish new ones, celebrate how lives have been transformed, and say a big thank you to God, and to all who have been part of thirty years of Romsey Mill!

Neil Perry, CEO

Courses: drama, numeracy

Last term, twelve young parents took part in a ten-week drama course, in association with Classworks Theatre. The group reflected on childhood dreams, how they felt themselves perceived as young mums, how they felt about motherhood and what they hoped for themselves and their children. The group bonded as they trusted each other enough to share their lives and memories. The course culminated in a professional and moving performance to a small audience at Romsey Mill. An audience member commented: "It was a very powerful piece of drama. It

challenged me to think about how I viewed young parents (often negatively). It made me realise that many of them do an amazing job, raising their children in difficult circumstances. They should be encouraged in this."



We are now running a numeracy course with twelve fantastic young women, all working very hard for their exams in July. I would like to thank them all for the effort, fun and enthusiasm they put in each week. Also a big thank you to the tutor, Karen, and to volunteers Amy, Katie, Megan and Mike. We couldn't do it without their support and dedication.

Emily Barton, Young Parents Progressions Worker

Rocking tots

Take pulsating music, dimmed lights, and bright sparkly dresses. Add unbelievable make-up and bubbles blowing through the air, and what do you get? Romsey Mill's 'Rocking Tots' fancy dress disco, with face painting as an added extra!

F@RM (Friends @ Romsey Mill) planned and publicised the whole event. Twinkling

lights were strung across the darkened room, glo-sticks were shining, our own special compilation of music was being played by an enthusiastic (8 year old) DJ and everyone was dancing.

The event was a great success, with a mixture of mums, dads and children from Romsey Mill's various activities for families with children under five mingling and dancing away their time together happily.



Two friends' story

Clare* and Sarah* are close friends with whom we have been working for nearly two years. Their secondary school initially identified them to us as needing extra support, for a variety of reasons.



Clare is a lovely girl who feels trapped by her circumstances. She is a young carer for her siblings and can be easily angered by situations and people. Sarah is also a delightful girl, who has a tendency to fall into a depressive, introspective mood at times. She fears that she may suffer from poor mental health in the long term.

Both girls have been part of an after school club, run by our Transitions Programme, since they started at secondary school. The group has engaged in activities such as cooking, craft, sport, outdoor community activities and days out.

In order to get a sense of how Romsey Mill has helped them during this time, we asked the girls 'what does Romsey Mill mean to you?' Three major things emerged from our chat:

The primary factor that the girls highlighted was that Romsey Mill is somewhere separate for them. It is neither home nor school and, perhaps more importantly, the staff are neither teachers nor parents. For them Romsey Mill represents somewhere they

can feel independent and relax.

As staff we see this in sessions that can be fairly passive and restful. However, there can be occasions when the girls feel the need to act out their emotions, especially when they feel trapped by circumstances and events.

This can be quite difficult to deal with, both for the girls themselves and for staff members, but we feel it is important they do this on our time, and not where it might have a more detrimental effect.

A second reason that the girls like the Mill is that they get to do what they want here. Thanks to the resources available the girls can pick and choose or just hang out. We have a good variety of activities to suit the children's mood. It is important that our time with them is not prescriptive as so much of their time is accounted for and filled with school or domestic duties.

Thirdly, they said that they know they can talk to our staff or volunteers if they have a problem. This is such a blessing for us to be so closely involved in their lives and it's an honour to have the children's confidence.

We have seen how important this connection has proved to be for the girls over the past 18 months. Although we can't pretend to be the solution to all these girls' needs, we can just give them the space they need to develop as individuals in a world which can be bewildering to people of any age.

*names have been changed, and image shows different girls

Church doors open to autism

"Autism, the Church and the Community: Opening the Doors Wider" was the title of a recent conference at St. Andrew's church, Histon attended by representatives of Romsey Mill's Aspire Programme. Organised by the Ely Diocese as part of their 900-year celebrations, the day featured a number of speakers, including Professor Baron-Cohen from Cambridge University's Autism Research Centre.

The day informed church leaders and members about autistic spectrum conditions (ASCs) and the difficulties faced by affected families. It also opened up the discussion around how the church can be more inclusive for people with ASCs. This is no mean feat because church, by its nature, is often very social, but people with ASCs struggle to understand and be part of the social world. In many ways the conference raised more questions than it answered about how the church faces this difficult task, but it was greatly encouraging to see so many people in the church engaging with the issues. We were able to raise awareness of our Aspire Programme's expanding work with young people on the autistic spectrum, with a view to increased partnership.

News in brief



- **Art therapy course.** A group of 12-13 year-old girls are enjoying a six week course with a qualified art therapist. They are exploring their self-image and expressing their thoughts and feelings through activities such as a group mural and abstract self-portraits.
- **Continuing with education.** All of the Year 11 students finishing our vocational course, previously at risk of disengaging with education, applied for further education places.
- **Young parents' careers fair.** In April we held a careers fair specifically for young parents. The successful event was attended by about twenty young parents and representatives from Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge Regional College, 'V' (volunteering), National Childminding Association, e2e, Job Centre Plus, YMCA training and Connexions.

Wylies' Watershed Way - the finale

Pioneer Malcolm Wylie has just completed the final 125 miles of his epic sponsored walk from John o'Groats to Land's End, along the British watershed. That means he has walked the length of Britain without crossing any running water – the first time anyone has achieved this, as far as we know.

The most direct route by road is 874 miles, but avoiding waterways has led to Malcolm travelling more like 1800 miles, covering a section each summer over fourteen years. This year he walked about 125 miles through Cornwall, from Bude to Land's End via Bodmin Moor.

Malcolm, one of our trustees, had already raised over £6,000 for Romsey Mill's trips and residentials programme from the previous legs of his journey. This year sponsors have been particularly generous: he is close to his target of £3000! If you would like to help Malcolm reach his target, you can still sponsor him online via www.justgiving.com/malcolmwylie.

Malcolm explains, "This started out as a rather mad idea in 1995, when it occurred to me that it could be done and probably hadn't been done before. The first section starting at John o'Groats in 1996 demonstrated that it was probably feasible, although there was a good deal of bog-hopping and a rather dangerous climb involved. When I got back from that first week and started talking about it, lots of people suggested that I should use it to raise sponsorship for a good cause. So I decided that as well as enjoying the 14-year adventure, I'd raise money for Romsey Mill. I've been associated with the Mill on and off since it was set up, and the Mill team was really helpful to my daughter Emma when she

needed help as a troubled teenager.

"I've thoroughly enjoyed walking the length of this wonderful country of ours, and there have been too many highs and lows (literally and emotionally) to

mention. Naturally, the welcome party at Land's End on 20th June was fantastic.

"My favourite quote about the venture came in 2000 from the landlady of Moss Paul Inn, near the Scottish border. Having heard my story, I overheard her saying to another guest: "You see that man over there - he's walking from John o'Groats to Land's End without passing water".

His adventurous spirit unquenched, Malcolm now plans to climb all 284 of the Munros – Scotland's highest mountains. He has already scaled 109 of them - 50 as part of the Watershed Way – and aims to climb the final one on his 70th birthday! When we told Malcolm he's an inspiration, he replied 'or just mad'! Maybe, but we're sticking with inspirational.



Sponsored events

Emily and Ben Barton ran the Paris marathon in aid of Romsey Mill and raised nearly £900. Many thanks, and congratulations!

As we go to press, the Writtle Singers are putting on a concert at Gonville & Caius College in Cambridge. We are very grateful that they have decided to take a retiring collection in aid of Romsey Mill.



Rooms for hire

Meetings - Parties - Sports

With meeting rooms, sports hall, creative arts, café style area, kitchen and children's activity spaces, Romsey Mill Centre caters for a wide range of events at competitive rates. A local community rate is also available, and all proceeds go towards the work of Romsey Mill.

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