

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
20th November 2016 at 3pm
Venue – The Vassall Centre, Bristol**

Present

Board of Trustees

Voting Trustees – Emma Stevenson, Wilson McKelvie
Rob Smith – Treasurer

Apologies – Liz Ward, Kirsty Robarts

Staff

Debbie Hye, Lin Williams

AGM Chair

Megan Evans

Total in attendance

22 people from 16 families attended the meeting.

Introduction

Megan Evans opened the meeting and introduced herself as Chair of the AGM.

1. Minutes of the last AGM

Acceptance of the minutes of the AGM held on 22nd November 2015, which had been circulated to the trustees and members prior to the meeting was proposed by D Bowden and seconded by M Todd.

2. Reports and Accounts

Report from Centre Manager

Debbie Hye gave a review of the charity's activities during the financial year April 2015 to March 2016 plus an update on the following months.

Services

Sign Language Tuition - The Big Lottery Fund (BLF) was funding the Family Centre courses but

the grant was due to cease in summer 2016. During the year there had been difficulties in finding Deaf tutors to deliver services such as the Level 1 course and the Sign Language Tuition at Home programme and the Teenage Taster sessions couldn't be run due to the lack of a school or tutor to work with. The number of families wishing to learn BSL decreased and this was evident by the fact that the BSL Level 1 course was attended by a family of 4, 3 professionals, 3 family friends and 1 other parent. The Children's Beginners course, which was originally made up of separate Tots and Children's classes was merged into one group. There was also a drop in the number of children signing up for the Children's Improvers course so the name was changed to Voices Off and the format changed to make it activity based and encourage more experienced signers to register. Although 11 children signed up for the course only 2 came to all 6 sessions and the second set of sessions had to be abandoned. With regard to the Adult Beginners classes there were 7 registrations but only 2 people attended all 6 sessions. Conversation practice sessions were eventually ceased as numbers were so low. However, the Grandparents and relatives courses, now known as Sign Club, were well attended with 12 individuals going along to them and Debbie observed that some of those attendees had come along to the AGM.

Going forward it would be impossible to fundraise for further sessions due to delivery difficulties and poor attendance figures.

Family Events - Debbie Hye ran through all the family events that had been run throughout the year 2015/16. These consisted of a trip to Windmill Hill City Farm, Summer Party, Halloween Party, AGM activity, Christmas Party, Mothers' Day and Mad Hatters Tea Party. She said that the Summer Party and Halloween Party numbers had been down on the previous year, some other events had only had three families attend. Some events had been cancelled due to low numbers, including the Halloween Party in October 2016. In addition, difficulties had been experienced recruiting and retaining suitably qualified session workers to deliver the sessions. The Activity Membership was scrapped due to low uptake.

Going forward it would be impossible to seek further funding for family events based on the low level of demand.

Deaf Youth Club (DYC) - Debbie Hye said that the number of young people attending the DYC was lower than had been hoped for, with only 1/3 of the attendees being Bristol residents. This was a cause for concern as 88% of the cost of delivering the youth club had come from Bristol City Council. During the year 29 sessions had been run and 38 young people had attended sessions. Of these only 7 had come to more than 50% of the sessions with many just booking on occasionally, and 12 attending only one session.

Going forward Debbie Hye reported that the full DYC Autumn 2016 programme had not been able to be delivered due to staffing shortages and that during summer 2016 there had been such little interest initially in signing up for the school holiday programme of events that at one point all the sessions were under threat of cancellation. She added that Bristol City Council had recently announced a 25% cut in its Children and Young People's budget and was looking at getting good value for money for services that were being recommissioned.

Funding after March 2016 was not guaranteed in the short or long term, and the DYC hadn't met the Commissioner's aspirations. The Bristol Youth Links (BYL) funding forms a significant part of the charity's income and if it were lost, it would be hard to achieve the same level of funding if grants were sought elsewhere.

Kids Club – This had been popular up to Summer 2016, attendance at the sessions had been good and there was sufficient funding to continue until 2018, although this just covered event costs and not charity running costs. Unfortunately difficulties were experienced in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified sessional workers to deliver these sessions.

Going forward numbers decreased in Autumn 2016 and the December 2016 session was cancelled due to low numbers.

Governance

At the AGM in 2015 members agreed changes to the Constitution but plans to re-register as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) were put on hold due to staffing/resourcing difficulties. To go forward with this would require a considerable amount of effort from both trustees and staff and a plan for the future. During the year it had been difficult to hold quorate meetings due to the low number of trustees and the situation had become worse recently. Debbie Hye warned that although 4 members were standing for election at today's meeting, which meant that there would potentially be 7 trustees in total, it was likely that it would still be a struggle to hold quorate meetings and a lot of work would need to be done to achieve CIO status. Debbie Hye also made the audience aware that one of the proposed trustees had not arrived at the meeting at that point and so may not be able to stand for election.

Fundraising

At the last AGM it had been reported that as a result of difficulties encountered in finding and managing resources over the year less time had been devoted to fundraising. In addition, over the last year there had been a big drain on staff time due to chasing bookings and payments from families. A strategic plan was required in order to fundraise for services which meant that the trustees would have to give serious consideration to the shape of The Family Centre going forward.

Staff

The lack of registrations, time spent promoting events and constantly chasing payments plus difficulties putting together a sessional staff schedule had put a big strain on Debbie Hye and Lin Williams and caused staff morale to become so low that neither employee could see their future with the charity any longer.

Report from Treasurer

Using a Powerpoint presentation Rob Smith showed members a chart which gave a breakdown of The Family Centre's funding sources. This indicated that most of the income had come from statutory funding and grants with very little income coming from families accessing services. Most of the statutory funding had been received from Bristol City Council for the DYC but, as previously explained there was uncertainty over the future of this funding. The other main source of funding was from BLF for sign language classes and this helped to finance some of the charity's running costs as well as actual delivery costs. Funding had now finished but given the problems with delivering the services it was unlikely that further grants would be made. If statutory and grant funding is reduced in the future The Family Centre may have to look at how it charges for events as the income from this is currently very low. There was enough money left in the Kids Club fund to deliver sessions up to 2018 but alternative funding may have to be found for the DYC if statutory funding ceases as delivery of this service accounts for a high proportion of the charity's income/expenditure. Rob Smith explained that most funders want to fund a particular activity so it was important that the charity is able to provide good results. He added that more than half of The Family Centre's expenditure was apportioned to the office staff's salaries with a further 9% being spent on office running costs but that some of the funding received includes a provision for this.

Rob Smith reported that in the past unrestricted income was easier to obtain but the trend is now to give restricted funding for a specific purpose or project. Although unrestricted reserves have been at a healthy level they are now starting to be eaten into because less people have been fundraising and planned fundraising sessions have been cancelled due to lack of support. There are currently sufficient reserves to continue for an interim period but because of the charity's uncertain future, care will need to be taken when spending existing funds. Whatever the outcome of today's meeting money will need to be set aside for staff redundancies and closure costs. If members vote to close the charity this would be done in a phased manner and unspent restricted funds would be returned. If the vote was to keep The Family Centre open members would need to take into consideration that the Bristol City Council funding could be at risk of ceasing.

Questions to Centre Manager/Treasurer

In view of the fact that a large proportion of DYC users are South Gloucestershire residents a question was raised about approaching South Gloucestershire Council for a grant towards the costs. Debbie Hye replied that this had been tried in the past to no avail. Bristol City Council had a history of funding various Deaf services in Bristol, which had led to the DYC's inclusion in Bristol Youth Links which funds youth services in the city, including the Family centre.

In response to a question about the availability of other Deaf services Debbie Hye replied that there was no other organisation like The Family Centre locally and that there were currently over 150 families registered although only 10% of these were regular service users.

Members were concerned about The Family Centre's low profile and were surprised to learn that Debbie Hye had a commitment from Sensory Support Services and Audiology Departments that they would hand out information leaflets about the charity to families of deaf children that they supported. Debbie Hye pointed out that between these two organisations the vast majority of families in the area would have received information at some point.

In response to a question about how long the unrestricted reserves would last if The Family Centre stayed open Rob Smith estimated that it could continue to run for a further 8 months depending on how events are run. He stressed that the proposal to close the charity had not been put forward on financial grounds.

After listening to the Centre Manager's and Treasurer's reports one member commented that the presentations had been very negative and that families still got lots of value going to events even if the numbers attending were very low.

Other members present at the meeting then gave their opinions about various family events that had been held over the years including the view that they didn't cater for the older children as well as the young ones.

Among suggestions put forward to attract more users was the joining together of the Kids Club and DYC so that the older children could help the younger ones and using parents as volunteers to alleviate staffing difficulties.

Several members said they would be happy to pay more to attend events and were pleased to hear that other families outside of the immediate area were welcome to come along to activities.

3. Appointment of Charity Trustees

Megan Evans informed the audience that Family Centre member Jane Whittard, who had put herself forward as a trustee had not turned up to the meeting so it was up to families whether to vote for her or not. There were 3 other members standing for election as follows:

Maggie Todd – She has been a part of The Family Centre for 3 – 4 years and works part-time as an administrator. Her son is deaf and she found out about the charity when she attended a Sensory Support Service open day. He told her that The Family Centre "is a place I can go where no-one asks me questions about my deafness". Maggie is Chair of a local Out of School Club, and she helped change its status to a CIO. She was willing to stand as Chair of The Family Centre as she has lots of leadership and governance experience.

Neil Curry – He has a 2 year old granddaughter who is deaf. As a service user he wanted The Family Centre to stay open and thrive so he decided to stand as a trustee because he is retired, as plenty of time and “does what he is told”.

Laura Broadbent – Her son has moderate to severe hearing loss. She attended the BSL Level 1 course and has just started attending Family Centre events. She is currently on the Bristol Deaf Children’s Society committee and wants to raise public awareness of The Family Centre’s services.

The outcome of the vote was that 15 families voted for Maggie, Neil and Laura to join the Board of Trustees. Jane Whittard, who did not appear to be known to any families present at the meeting, received 3 votes and so was unable to be elected as a trustee in her absence.

Kirsty Robarts and Liz Ward, who were unable to attend the AGM and were standing down as trustees, were thanked publicly by Megan Evans for all their help over the last few years.

4. Plans for the Future

Trustees Emma Stevenson and Wilson McKelvie gave a presentation on the options available to The Family Centre: controlled closure or how the charity might go forward.

The Family Centre was now at a crossroads and if it was to remain open a lot of things would need to change. The trustees had considered the legal implications of changing to a CIO and were aware of current staffing and funding problems. If the charity closed down money would need to be returned to funders and after closure costs had been accounted for the remaining funds would be transferred to another charitable organisation. If The Family Centre was to stay open a strong effective Board of Trustees would be required. It was recognised that becoming a trustee is a big time commitment and so trustee training was very important. The trustees would need to engage more with other members, encourage parents to volunteer at events and change the status of the charity to CIO. The Family Centre would then be able to advertise outside of the membership for prospective trustees with good governance skills.

Emma Stevenson ran through a list of pros and cons including the difficulties that staff had faced dealing with a small number of service users who could be abusive on occasions. She ended by saying that The Family Centre’s greatest resource was experienced and highly motivated staff and volunteers.

Wilson McKelvie urged families to think carefully about all the information presented to them, and how much they themselves could commit to The Family Centre before making a decision about the future of the charity.

5. Election of Officers

The results of the votes for the election of officers to the posts of Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary were as follows:

Maggie Todd	Chair	15 votes
Emma Stevenson	Vice- Chair	15 votes
Laura Broadbent	Secretary	15 votes

6. Questions and Member Discussion

Following the vote it was confirmed that there were now 6 trustees on the Board. The Constitution states that 5 trustees are required for a quorate meeting. A member asked if further trustees could be appointed during the year, but the Constitution states that trustees must be elected at the AGM, unless the number of trustees fall below the minimum number required to constitute a quorate meeting.

Megan Evans explained to a member who raised a question about payments to the trustees for their time spent on governance that under charity law trustees could not be paid.

In response to a question about the accounts Lin Williams explained that there had been a delay in receiving them due to last minute queries but would email out a copy to members as soon as the report had been signed off. There was currently around £59,000 of free reserves including a designated relocation fund of £8,000 to allow for the fact that The Family Centre office would incur expenditure on changing premises when the school in which it is currently based relocates to another site. However, this was not expected to happen for at least 2 years, according to a member of the school's Board of Governors who was attending the meeting as the parent of a deaf child.

One member commented that she was aware that certain other parents had been told that they could not come along to the meeting to have their say because they did not want to pay the £5 membership fee. She later added that there had been a lot of bad feeling towards The Family Centre. In response Emma Stevenson said that if The Family Centre was to progress lots of families would need to support the organisation.

7. Resolution to Dissolve the Charity

Before the vote took place Megan Evans ran through the options for The Family Centre's future once again, stressing that if members voted to keep the charity open it would require a lot of commitment from families in the future.

The result of the resolution to dissolve The Family Centre was that it was unanimously rejected by members.

8. Auditors

Quotes for the preparation of accounts for April 2016 – March 2017 would be obtained from various auditors nearer the time.

9. Any Other Business

It was suggested that there could be an open meeting with parents and trustees to discuss the way forward now that The Family Centre was going to continue operating and this idea was noted by the trustees.

At the end of the meeting Megan Evans announced that Debbie Hye and Lin Williams had discussed their concerns about the charity's situation with her prior to the meeting and had handed in their resignations following the decision to keep The Family Centre open.

The meeting closed at 4.15pm.

The date of the next AGM, due to take place in November 2017, will be confirmed nearer to the time.