

Chair's Annual Report HARC 2023

As always, I would like to start by offering my huge thanks to all of the volunteers, paid workers (Project Leads and Kitchen leads), those who have come into the project to provide entertainment and other services. I would also like to thank the staff of Victoria Hall and my fellow trustees who are dedicated and work hard throughout the year. Our Project Manager, Liz Grasso, ably assisted by Samantha Stocks who manages volunteer recruitment had their own challenges with the move to a new volunteer registration and rota system and their persistence and hard work has meant successful engagement of volunteers to work at the project. We have had many kind comments from our guests, our volunteers and our visitors which we are very grateful for. I would like to share one of the comments we received with you:

I have volunteered over the last few years and I think it is fantastic what HARC does over the Christmas period.

There will always be glitches or slight improvements to be made.

But the main thing is you, your team and trustees deliver every year a key service and support to a lot of people, many of whom are vulnerable.

There must be a lot happening throughout the year and behind the scenes during the opening period which isn't seen for it to be so successful.

Well done to you all.

I look forward to volunteering again next year

We are continually looking for new ways of bringing money into the project. It seems that a bucket on a bar in a pub when there is a home football match can bring in several hundreds of pounds and it beats standing around in the cold at Christmas markets. Liz worked hard as usual to apply for small pots of funding from trusts and charities to help with our running costs. As you will imagine costs are still on the increase and we also like to make sure that our workers are remunerated at a rate that reflects their responsibility and also the fact that they are working on Bank Holidays. Pay will again be under review to take into account cost of living increases.

I must also thank the organisations that give money, clothes and toiletries year after year.

I want to share some numbers with you to give you some idea of what we are achieving:

This year we served:

769 breakfasts 540 in 2022(compared to 250 in 2021) 3 times what was served in 2021

1,093 lunches 870 in 2022(compared to 590 in 2021) double what was served in 2021

900 takeaway teas 870 in 2022(compared to 590 in 2021) almost double what was served in 2021

We took the decision to continue to offer takeaway meals and hot drinks at the George St entrance for those guests who did not want, for whatever reason, to come inside. This will continue to be under review.

The quality of the menu on offer is very high and this year we had 4 people who took on the role of Catering Lead. They faced the challenge of feeding a higher than every number of people from the small kitchen. The amount of rubbish that is generated by using disposable plates, dishes, cups and cutlery was a problem, exacerbated by the increased number of guests and we will be looking at ways to reduce this.

Many of our volunteers come back to HARC year after year and so do our guests; we welcome the first but not so much the second.

We understood that there would be an increased number of people visiting us this year and appreciated that there would be more people with more complex needs. This proved to be the case and ultimately caused more challenges for volunteers, paid workers and visitors each day.

Volunteer applications were up but the conversion to volunteers that signed up for a shift were down meaning that some shifts were understaffed, and this caused some concern.

Services that we were able to provide were 2 x hairdressers, the community nurses (thanks Michaela), a dentist, drugs and alcohol services and housing solutions.

Volunteers were supported by 2 paid project leads during each shift again last year. This is to provide security for our guests and volunteers.

The clothes store, though popular with guests, often produces difficulties. Locating the clothes store in the Lower Hall was not ideal. We will be looking for ways to make this easier to manage while providing items of clothing and toiletries that are need by our guests.

Entertainment. Bingo was as popular as always and the purchase of a small amplifier and microphone meant that it was easier to hear in the large space of the Lower Hall. Two sessions of Karaoke proved popular with some of our guests having access to the words and backing music of their favourite songs available.

To finish, thanks must also go to the Sheffield General Cemetery Trust for allowing us to use this beautiful building for our AGM again this year.

And now a little bit about the future of HARC

After the challenges that we faced during the project in 2023 with increased numbers of guests, decreased numbers of volunteers, more complex behaviour demonstrated by our guests and of course the extremely wet weather we have made the decision that we need to make some changes. We as trustees look at the reviews from our paid staff and volunteers and reflect on what has worked well and what we could do better. In the light of this project will be evolving. We have decided to go back to our core mission which is to provide a good safe Christmas experience for our guests and will adjust what is delivered accordingly. In 2024 the project will be open on Christmas Day and Boxing Day only. We will be able to use the main hall of Victoria Hall to give us more space, an improved entrance and the luxury of a lobby area. There will be challenges. For example, this hall is not near the kitchen. However, we feel that this will be a great improvement.

Some of you may have already heard that Liz has decided to stand down as Project Manager after working in this role for 12 years. Many of you will have had a lot of contact with Liz over these years and I'm sure that you will agree that she has been at the heart and soul of this successful project. We want to pass our heartfelt thanks to Liz for all that she has done to provide a great Christmas for our guests, to make things easy for our volunteers and to engage so many people who have worked for HARC during the project. Liz has kindly said that she will stay on and work with us on fundraising which we are very pleased about. So it is at this stage that we officially must say goodbye and thankyou to Liz with a few small gifts. Please join with me in showing your appreciation.

The other news that we would like to share is that we are delighted to be able to tell you that after due process we have appointed Jazmine Douglas and Stephanie Haines who will work together as Project Managers. Today is their first official day so please join with me in welcoming them.

Julie Roberts March 2024