

Secretary's Report for AGM 21/06/2012

Introduction

By rights I should be reporting on the period from Oct 2010 to Sept 2011 but as we were elected last August I will be reporting on what has been done in the last 10 months. We have been very busy since our election last August so there is quite a bit to report on so please bear with me.

Early on we met with many groups and individuals and found some of them were keen to assist us in the challenges we faced. The main challenge facing us was to address the cost structures in the Centre. It was clear we had to cut costs and increase income. Angela has given you details on what we did financially but I'll give an overview of the process.

We applied for and received a training grant from NEKD and through this came to work with a consultant named John Loughrey, who has since gone on to work for NEKD. Through working with him, we aimed to develop the Company's effectiveness as an organisation through a Training and Development Process. We identified 2 main areas we had to address immediately, the first was cost structures, especially in the Childcare Service, and the second was the whole area of HR policies and procedures.

Cost structures in Childcare

John advised us to talk to Oonagh Fleming of Kerry County Childcare because of her expertise in the childcare sector. She told us we had to make changes in order to ensure the long term viability of the service. We had to look at a number of areas:-rationalising staffing hours, reviewing our booking and fee policies and potentially offering new services. We have addressed all these areas. As mentioned by Angela, we have reduced staffing costs through negotiation and agreement with staff; we have changed our booking and fee policies for the Childcare Service so as to maximise use and these changes will take effect in Sept. We are looking at offering more services which I'll discuss later.

In the Centre as a whole

Angela has done exceptional work in developing systems to track and monitor all income and spending. The auditor's job will be much easier next year. The information gathered is shared and discussed at weekly meetings with the Management Team, Pat Murphy (Community Centre Manager), Julia O'Halloran (Childcare manager) and Bernie Kearney who manages the office. Spending has been hugely curtailed and only what is absolutely necessary is purchased. Angela has given you details on this.

HR Policies and Procedures

John Loughrey brought a HR expert named Tina Mulhearn from HR Direct to help us put in place proper policies and procedures for staff. We now have a Staff Handbook with policies and procedures and all staff now have new contracts. This was a very important piece of work for staff and for the Board as employers.

KCCC have assisted us in implementing the policies and procedures and have helped us to develop a staff appraisal system. So far we have carried out staff appraisals with all the childcare staff. We are

involved in on-going work with Kathryn O'Donnell from KCCC with regard to staff development and training.

Policies and Procedures in Childcare

Through working with Tina we realised how important policies and procedures are and so set to doing an audit of all the childcare policies and procedures. Anna Marie has done an enormous amount of work ensuring we have all the policies and procedures we need and this piece of work is in the final stages so all these will be in place for Sept.

Childcare more generally

As previously mentioned we were advised to look at our booking policy and fee structures for childcare. We did this. Our aim is to maximise use of the crèche, pre-school and After School Club so that we are financially viable and we would hope to be able to increase staff hours if there is sufficient work for them.

Staff

The past 10 months have not been easy for staff here in the Centre and the previous year was also difficult. They have had to endure huge upheaval and have had to adapt to many changes. We have tried to be as open and honest as possible and have worked hard at communicating effectively with them. I would like to thank them for their help and support. With us all working together we can face any challenges that may lie ahead.

Grants

We successfully applied for a few grants, the first being the training grant from NEKD as previously mentioned. We received welcome news earlier this month when we heard we were partially successful in our application to Pobal's Childcare Capital Programme 2012. We applied for €50,000 to upgrade the Childcare facilities. We got approval for nearly €30,000, €29,800 to be exact. We plan to commence work on the renovations in August. We held a meeting with parents of children using the service on Tuesday of this week to discuss the disruption the renovations will cause. We are in the process of speaking to the parents who didn't attend the meeting. Once we have all the information we need we will put together a plan to accommodate parents as best we can. An engineer is currently doing drawings for us and we will meet with necessary agencies to discuss the plans before any work commences.

We have also applied for a Sports Capital Grant and for HSE lottery funding and have yet to hear about those.

We continue to receive on-going grants from Pobal and the HSE. The Pobal funding supports us in running the childcare service and the HSE funding supports the running of the Senior's Group who meet here every Tuesday.

Senior's

The Senior Citizens' volunteer committee offer a valuable service to the older members of our community. I don't think people quite appreciate what a wonderful service this is. Ann Moynihan from the HSE is a great support to this group as well as being a wonderful help to us directors. We meet with the volunteers regularly and have established a good working relationship with them.

Mother and Toddlers group

At the other end of the age spectrum we have our mother and toddlers' group who meet herein the hall every Wednesday morning. In our early days here they had thoughts of moving to the Retreat Centre. We met with them to discuss matters and I'm happy to say they have remained here.

Walnut grove field

The field is used primarily by 2 groups, the athletics club and the local soccer club. Ardfert N.S. also use it from time to time. Access to the field has occasionally been an issue with those living close by. We met with local residents and reached an agreement with many of them. We have found that many hurdles are easily overcome by discussion and compromise.

Forging Community Links

We are keen to forge links with other groups in the Community and have made progress in that regard through our collaboration with the GAA on the Dog Night. We worked with the Tidy Towns Committee when we took part in the National Spring Clean and spent a Saturday in April cleaning the village. We also took part in the Public meeting in the school about the Ardfert Village plan and later met with the consultant Dirk Hutterman. As I mentioned a moment ago, we feel we have a good rapport with the residents near Walnut Grove and all the groups that use the Community Centre. We hope people feel we are easy to approach and are interested in accommodating people if at all possible.

Fenit After School Club

We have also forged links further afield, with the Parish Hall in Fenit and the parents' association in Fenit N.S. We were asked if we would be interested in operating an After School Club there as we have expertise in that area and suitably qualified staff. We agreed to explore this as an idea as it could generate a modest income and would allow us to give more work to our staff. Preliminary research has indicated there is sufficient demand so we intend to run an After School club in Fenit from Sept. Applications forms are being distributed at the moment and we hope to know for certain next week if we have enough demand to go ahead.

Summary

As you can see it has been a busy 10 months. We have done a lot and learned a lot. We feel we are making good progress and hope the coming year will be better again.

Barbara O'Grady (Secretary)
Ardfert Community Council Ltd.