

Spring Edition | 2011



Steppin' Stone willow sculpture day in conjunction with Simon House

The day started at 10am and ran till 4pm in perishing cold weather, but was extremely well attended by our members who showed enthusiasm and willingness all day. The building was led by Susie Dadd, a willow sculptress well respected across the south west of England. We started by cutting our longest and straightest willow from the coppice on the allotments on the Oxford field of the Elder Stubbs allotments. We marked out the basic circle shape and prepared the ground by roughly levelling it and spreading wood bark. We then put in the main uprights and bent them into position to form the basic structure for our living willow shelter.



During the day, we gradually cut more willow and wove in more uprights, stopping for a fish and chips lunch (just what we needed!) and plenty of tea breaks. Everyone was delighted with the structure, the way they had worked so hard as a team to complete the project in a day; and the fact

that many of the participating members put the final finishing touches by making willow stars to hang from the ceiling.



It was a wonderful, inspiring, creative day and we are left with a living willow dome which will change and grow throughout the years to come. It will need continual maintenance and provides a fantastic space for quiet relaxation or small group meetings.

We have ordered two rustic benches to go inside the shelter and wish to thank everyone who turned up on the day to work and Barclays who so kindly sponsored the event.

Sharon

Sponsored walk Saturday 7th May along the Thames footpath Donnington Bridge to Abingdon return by boat courtesy of Salters Steamers. Sign in and leave Donnington Bridge 11.30am, be ready to pick the boat up at the Nags Head pub Abingdon at 3pm. Free picnic. The walk is approximately eight miles. To obtain a sponsorship form phone 01865-865234, e-mail mike@theporch.org.uk or collect from Steppin' Stone.



Picture by Robin

Members' stories:

After years of living a very chaotic life filled with drug/alcohol use I have slowly started to get more involved with the Steppin' Stones Centre. I have recently started to do an O.C.N Cookery Course so that I may learn some of the basics of living an independent life, I am finding the course very useful and I am continuously surprising myself at what I can do. Although I do struggle at times I know it will be worth it as by the end I will have a recognised qualification.

As well as the O.C.N course I am also taking part in the Porch Pickles project on a Friday morning. Before getting involved in these activities I felt daunted at the thought of spending any time in the kitchen, since starting them I feel that my confidence is growing and I am now determined to complete them.

I am grateful to both the members and the staff of Steppin' Stones and plan to continue the journey that I have started.

Jon V

Darren's story

Darren says that Steppin' Stone has turned his life around! He used to be in the forces, left in order to commit to a relationship but sadly that didn't work out after all.

After much unhappiness he moved away to make a new start. "I started out in Oxford in the Backpackers Hostel and then in O'Hanlon House" he says. "It was there that I heard about Steppin' Stone and started to come here. I was made really welcome" he goes on – "I had a lot of help from Mike."

Darren speaks very warmly of SSC: "It helped my progression on to my current stage, where I have got myself a roof over my head, a part-time job volunteering in the Oxfam shop in the city centre, I've got my benefits sorted out and I've had help preparing my CV." He hopes to get into engineering. "I was in the Engineers and now I have made an application to do an Open University degree, which I can do

part-time while I work at a job." Darren says he didn't want to be a scrounger so has been doing voluntary work for a year. "I had depression after the relationship failed, so I need time to get ready for a full time job – it would have been too demanding straight away. Steppin' Stone has been helping me all the way."

Another enthusiastic story

Lee has dreadlocks and is colourfully dressed. "I don't like the idea of going to a hairdresser and leaving my cut hair with strangers there" she says with a laugh.

"This place is wonderful" she goes on. "Oxford is so healing. I had a bad trauma in London, anchored to the architecture there. I had panic attacks. It's so peaceful here."

In London Lee went to St Martin's in the Field, where she particularly enjoyed the art group. "It's so spiritual there," she says, "all faiths are made welcome. The people in London were very special; even those at the bottom would give to charity." But a hostel in London was a bad experience, with many people there who had mental health problems such as agoraphobia, panic attacks and schizophrenia. Lee's mother was a paranoid schizophrenic and it all came back. The food wasn't proper vegetarian either.

Lee goes on to speak warmly of the difference volunteers make. "They bridge the gap between the workers and the clients" she says. "In this place there's so much sincerity. When I first came here it was lovely – I wasn't pressurised into filling in anything at first and I wasn't made to have a photograph."

Lee speaks of a lost community with people full of fear. Earlier in her life she went to India. "Your parents have a view of you and you want to please so you conform" she says. "But in India, and here, I'm able to be who I really am." Lee suffers from anaemia which makes her breathless. "I'd like a place to live, but I would need to feel safe," she says. As it is she is sleeping rough.

The Director writes

June this year will be the tenth anniversary of the opening of the Steppin' Stone centre and by June we will have seen over 2,200 people become members. Those who have come and stayed will have had access to services and taken part in the various activities and educational opportunities that we provide. From having one allotment plot we now have twelve and a small orchard all maintained on a regular basis by members. A great number of these members have moved away from street-life and will be now living in their own home, having conquered addiction and found employment. We salute them all having the courage and perseverance to make very difficult but positive changes in their lives. We are celebrating by having "Open House" on Thursday 30th June, Friday 1st July and Saturday 2nd July at Steppin' Stone. Fuller details will appear on our webpage www.theporch.org. Please come; we will be delighted to welcome you.

Christ faced his ultimate challenge, was victorious, and rising from the dead appeared to the disciples saying "peace be with you". We at Steppin' Stone face our challenges daily. Easter is the special time we celebrate the glory of God who unquestionably has smiled on us –members, financial supporters, volunteers, trustees, staff, and all the many others who have helped in so many diverse ways and by their prayers. Thank you all, peace be with you, Happy Easter, Alleluia Alleluia!

Ian

April 1st – Outdoor team building

On a blustery April 1st – no fooling! nine members of Steppin' Stone and two staff spent a rewarding day at Youlbury Scout Camp near Oxford. Starting with the 3G swing, members worked as a team to haul two colleagues at a time up into the tree canopy to be flung loose in a giant swing – which proved too much for Nigel's stomach – no that is not him upside down on the swing!



This was followed by a very competitive crate stacking, which required members to work as a pair to climb onto the highest stack with their colleagues supporting them on ropes and adding more crates.

After a well-earned lunch we moved on to the Jacob's ladder: a real test of team work with three intrepid climbers having to work together to climb the 'ladder', with colleagues controlling their safety ropes.

The final event was a back to childhood moment as we took turns to fly through the trees on a zip wire. For our members this exceptional day was full of fun, offered excellent team work skills learning and encouraged members to face their demons and take on challenges. It also got staff to face theirs!

Many thanks to the kind donor who made this trip possible!

Sharon



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Signed _____

Date _____

Wonderful Porch Pickles for sale, made by Steppin' Stone members from produce grown on the Steppin' Stone allotments.



Email requests with your phone number to nigel@theporch.org.uk

Monthly prayers for homeless people and Network agencies: **Wednesday 4 May: 1.15-1.35 pm Friends Meeting House, St Giles.**

WOULD YOU BE HAPPY TO RECEIVE THE NEWSLETTER ELECTRONICALLY?

Many have told us they would and it would help us keep costs down. If this would suit you, please send an email with your name and the first line of your address to newsletter@theporch.fsbusiness.co.uk

www.theporch.org.uk

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