

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Date:** 17/12/2020

### **Subject: Walking in the Heart of a Winter Wonderland**

When Heart of the Park Play & Café remained closed after the second nationally imposed lockdown lifted, it left local residents and customers wondering what was going to happen to their regular socialising spot. It is not unusual for it to raise concerns, especially with the Community Centre being considered a central hub of Leigh Park.

Heart of the Park is a social enterprise being run by Community First's Positive Pathways supported volunteering project. The team had an idea to offer several Christmas Park Play sessions with limited spaces, to celebrate this time of year with loyal customers. They felt that it was a way to say thank you for their continued support and enthusiasm, even during this tough year.

The usual £1.50 entry fee for each child included a free plate of buffet food, a goody bag and a Christmas cracker. The café was also open for parents to enjoy a cup of barista style coffee or tea, to add a moment of comfort to their morning or afternoon session. The park play area was regularly cleaned by use of a fogging machine to ensure the utmost safety for customers.

The children and parents were impressed with the sessions. Kirsty Dodds said, "It was absolutely amazing today. Hats off to you all, you all made us feel so welcome, the kids loved it and it was an absolute bargain!" One of the favourite pieces of feedback from the sessions was from a little boy. When his mum asked him if he had enjoyed it he said, 'The best day ever'. That says it all!

Beverley Palmer from the Positive Pathways team, said "Our three sessions featured very special visitors – Mr and Mrs Claus from the North Pole plus a friendly elf and Olaf! These visitors were kindly loaned to us from the Leigh Park Christmas Grotto. The Grotto team plans lots of exciting activities for children in the area at this time of year, and this year their schedule looked a lot different as well. A Virtual Santa session took place on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> December, where Santa read out children's letters, with much more taking place online."

"The Heart of the Park Christmas sessions were made possible by the innovation and commitment of the Positive Pathways team, staff and Heart of the Park volunteers in the kitchen and café. Our thanks go out to them all and to the Leigh Park Christmas Grotto. We wish them all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

- End -

**Photos:**



### **Notes for Editors**

1. Information about Positive Pathways can be found online at <https://www.cfirfirst.org.uk/positivepathways/>, on Facebook @CFPositivePathways or Instagram @cfpositivepathways. The team can be contacted by email [positivepathways@cfirfirst.org.uk](mailto:positivepathways@cfirfirst.org.uk) or phone 02393 873 808.
2. For more information about the Heart of the Park Play & Café social enterprise, please email [enquirieslpcc@cfirfirst.org.uk](mailto:enquirieslpcc@cfirfirst.org.uk) or call Leigh Park Community Centre on 02392 476 382. They can be found on Facebook at @leighparkcommunitycentre and Twitter on @leighparkcc. The booking page can be found at <https://shop.cfirfirst.org.uk/park-play>.
3. Leigh Park Christmas Grotto can be found on Facebook group '**Leigh Park Christmas Grotto 2020**'.



4. Communities First Wessex (known as Community First) provides support and advice to local voluntary and community groups, charities and social enterprises in order to build their capacity and ensure a thriving and successful voluntary sector across East Hampshire, Fareham, Havant, New Forest and Winchester. We also provide a one stop shop for all aspects of volunteering; helping recruit and place volunteers throughout our local communities and providing specialist training for voluntary organisations.
5. Communities First Wessex also delivers critical community services including:
  - a. Community Transport and Dial a Ride in East Hampshire, Fareham, Gosport, Havant, New Forest, Winchester and Basingstoke. Wheels to Work in New Forest.
  - b. Shopmobility in Fareham, Havant, Chichester and Winchester
  - c. Health and wellbeing services including surgery signposting with GP surgeries in Bordon, Fareham and Waterlooville, Walking 4 Health in Fareham and the New Forest, and a Home Help and a Gardening Service for vulnerable people in Fareham.
  - d. Support for Community Buildings and managing agents for Leigh Park Community Centre in Havant
  - e. Rape and Sexual Abuse Counselling services
  - f. Specialist youth work in New Forest supporting young carers.
  - g. Work and skills based training and support for unemployed people
  - h. Supported volunteering for people with a range of needs including mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, and those with a physical or mild learning disability.
6. Communities First Wessex employs 110 staff, has more than 140 regular volunteers and has a turnover of £3.6m. Its main sources of income are local authority and government grants and contracts, Big Lottery Fund and a range of charitable trusts.
7. For further information contact:  
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